

—Fabian Kastner—Archive of the  
Average Swede—

## Chapter One

The National Archive of Sweden, huge and difficult to survey, is very old. No one really knows when it was founded, only that the vast collection of letters, acts and resolutions, copy books, manuscripts, and chronicles is rooted deep in the Middle Ages.

Neither does anyone know exactly how large the collection is. It has been estimated to be one billion running meters which, like a vascular network of question marks, answers, and obscure hints, runs shelf after shelf, century after century, through the archive's labyrinthine corridors.

Exactly what's hiding in its compact shelving isn't known either. Through the centuries, enormous efforts have been made to bring order to the chaotic mess of parchment and paper. Yet most of it remains unexplored.

The archive has survived a thousand perils. It has burned down and been rebuilt; been abducted abroad, tracked down, and recovered; and been secretly and quietly evacuated when war was imminent. It has been shipped over lakes, run aground, and soaked in water. It has suffered from moisture and rot, and been the object of political power struggles and the target of planned bombardments. And yet, the archive has always been its own worst enemy.

Already in the 1800s, the rapid inflow of documents had become so great that the building in the Old Town district of Stockholm that housed the collection at the time threatened to collapse under the weight of the archival mass. Since then, it has only gotten worse. Over the past hundred years, the archive has gone through an explosive growth that today is almost exponential. Architects, politicians, urban planners, and philosophers work in shifts around the clock to find new and ever-better storage solutions.

The archival records have been stored in coffins, caskets, boxes,

barrels, tubs, and bags, in cabinets and on shelves. They have been buried in excavated caverns and piled up in bombproof underground depositories. The archive has resided in castles, churches, and monasteries, been transferred to Norway, Denmark, and Germany, been subdivided and reassembled. Yet, the archive has remained what it always has been: a place between memory and oblivion, time and eternity.

Here the kingdom's history is manifested in peace documents from the 1323 Treaty of Nöteborg, in the registry of Gustav Vasa and the copy books of Sten Sture the Younger. The collected patents and designs of Alfred Nobel jostle with maps and journals from Sven Hedin's expeditions to Central Asia. Everything is devoured by the great archive.

It is assumed that the archive was originally the private archive of the monarch, which he took with him in a coffin as he traveled from castle to castle. And whenever one of these early kings was forced into exile, which was not an uncommon occurrence, he often took the archive abroad with him. In order to avoid losing important state documents, the archive was eventually made stationary. In the course of time, the king's archive also became the archive of queens, princes, and princesses. Soon, the nobility took its seat in history, too. Palatine counts and countesses, barons and baronesses, were joined by aristocrats. Then came bishops, generals, and judges, followed by the major poets, politicians, and scientists of the time. Industrialization opened the gates for companies. Following universal suffrage, introduced in the early 1900s, the great popular movements marched into the archive. The labor movement, the temperance movement, and the sports movement were followed by the women's movement, the popular education movement, the peace movement, the free church movement, the volunteer corps, the Scouts ...

Finally, listed in the archive's *Collection Summary of the Personal Archives*, among those of the lord marshals, governors, councilors, ambassadors, and academy members, is the archive of the Average Swede.

This archive stands out, and not only for its humble presentation—the donor, and the subject, of the archive is simply designated as a “civil servant.” Above all, what amazes is the extent of the collection. The size of personal archives is normally measured in volumes. Most archives consist of one or a few binders, files, photo albums, or the like. The archive of the Average Swede is measured in running meters. More specifically, twentyseven. Enough to devour hundreds and hundreds of standard office folders. This makes it one of the largest personal archives in the entire collection. Yet, the catalogued portion is only the stunning flower of a deeprooted forget-me-not.

According to the *Collection Summary*, the archive of the Average Swede was a project initiated by the National Archive in the early 1980s with the goal of “optimally documenting” the life of an ordinary Swedish citizen in the second half of the twentieth century. Again according to the summary, the “civil servant” in question handed over his personal documents in installments across the next thirty years.

Up until the early modern period, personal archives had typically been acquired by the state through trials and inquisitions. That collections would be voluntarily donated to the National Archive, as they are today, was unusual. Those now supplied to the National Archive are in the form of deposits, meaning that the archive holder retains ownership but is entrusting it to the National Archive for the benefit of historical research. The National Archive is thus not allowed to dispose of or cull a collection once it has been accepted into its care.

The factual circumstances of the Average Swede project have, like so much else in the history of the National Archive, sunk into oblivion. Those who were once responsible for the project have long since retired. Today, no one at the National Archive speaks about it, and the curious visitor is only reluctantly let into the repository. The background story is left to guesswork alone.

The Average Swede—proud, impetuous, and manly— was born in a medium-sized municipality in central Sweden in 1942, the same year that Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson stressed in a parliamentary speech that the Swedish welfare state, which the Social Democrats had been constructing since the interwar period, was a society based on “equal rights for all and care for all.”

It can only be assumed that it was in this democratic spirit that the idea was born to erect a monument to a man of the people in the very heart chamber of Swedish history—to make room for the common man among the kings, and to preserve his memory for eternity for the benefit of future historians.

Perhaps the project was inspired by the interstellar message from humanity that NASA had sent into infinity a few years earlier, in 1977, on the *Voyager* spacecraft: a gold-plated copper disk digitally engraved with all the finest that our civilization has to offer. The heartwarming smile of a sugar plantation worker in Guatemala, Beethoven string quartets, the ritual chant of a group of pygmy girls. Scientific discoveries, flowers, and animals. Greetings from all kinds of inhabitants of this very small planet.

Perhaps the archive of the Average Swede, too, was envisioned as a single small spacecraft, without passengers or a goal; a white dot in an endless sea of night. A time capsule loaded with everything we wanted to tell you about. Preserve. Remember. Share.

And perhaps it was the very significance of this historic mission,

the overwhelming feeling of elevated chosenness, that made the project turn out the way it did.

## 2

How do you begin the story of a life—your own? (And the story of others? The aspirations, longings, and dissatisfactions of a generation? The collective dreams and hopes of a people? A time, a world?) Perhaps with the Swedish state’s savings bonds. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from grandma and grandpa. Your very first Christmas gift. The yellowed savings bond book, with a handwritten note stating the date of arrival and the tax rates for 1942, is the first document in a series of binders, neatly numbered 1–29.

The savings bond book is in turn followed by:

- 1 folded poster featuring the Swedish flag, provincial coats of arms, and the national anthem
- 6 receipts for donations to the Social Mission
- 5 receipts for donations to Save the Children
- 3 receipts for donations to the Red Cross
- 1 ration card with coupons for cooking fat (20), beef (4), and pork (2)
- 1 deposit slip from the post office (blank)
- 1 postcard from Gothenburg (blank)
- 1 handwritten list of Sweden’s provincial and municipal coats of arms
- 1 Christmas card depicting the town of Västerås
- 1 letter from grandma
- 1 letter from the brother serving in the army
- 1 carbon copy of a letter, “riten on daddys tipe-riter”

- 1 receipt for writing materials from Helmer Grip's grocery store
- 8 Christmas cards with greetings from friends and family
- 1 brochure with Swedish road signs
- 1 handwritten list of watches owned, dated 1954
- 1 guarantee and insurance certificate from the watchmaker Stjärnurmakarna
- 1 handwritten list of owned notebooks and schoolbooks from the fall semester of 1953
- 1 brochure from the 1944 exhibition "Youth and Home"
- 1 cut-out newspaper article entitled "Youth and the Population Question"
- 1 flyer from Liberal Youth, the youth wing of the Liberal People's Party
- 1 poem by Erik Axel Karlfeldt
- 6 dental receipts
- 1 booklet of collectible stamps from the Postal Savings Bank
- 12 received letters and postcards
- 1 handwritten list of visits from the family doctor
- 1 handwritten report from a third-grade school trip
- 1 transcript of the City Theater's spring program
- 1 handwritten report about the school dance on May 28, 1952
- 1 handwritten list of participants on a school trip to Norway
- 1 congratulations card for 7th birthday
- 6 received postcards and letters
- 3 requests for confirmation that postcards and letters have arrived
- 1 handwritten report about a ski trip
- 1 handwritten report about a school excursion to Sollerön
- 24 cards with New Year's greetings, birthday greetings, Easter greetings, midsummer greetings, thank-you-for-everything greetings, thanks-for-the-card greetings
- 1 list of deaths and births in the municipality in 1952

- 1 brief account of the Battle of Lützen on November 6, 1632
- 1 reply coupon from the leftwing cultural magazine *Folket i Bild*
- 1 letter from *Folket i Bild* stating that the ordered picture book is no longer in stock
- 3 sheets of postage stamps
- 1 list of expenses for sundry items
- 1 handwritten report about a bus trip to Vattnäs on May 22, 1952
- 1 handwritten list of food and drinks consumed during twenty-four hours
- 1 transcript of a railway timetable
- 1 transcript of a bus timetable
- 1 receipt for an annual subscription of *Reader's Digest*
- 1 letter from the Social Mission
- 1 pencil drawing
- 1 booklet of Red Cross Christmas gift labels
- 6 cut-out Christmas gift labels with rhyming dedications
- 2 handwritten notes to the sister
- 4 insurance statements from the Social Insurance Agency
- 1 box of Göteborgs Kalaskex party biscuits (empty)
- 1 hospital bill
- 18 different kinds of wrapping paper for oranges
- 1 dental clinic card
- 1 insurance card
- 1 handwritten list of magazine subscriptions
- 12 cut-out articles from various newspapers
- 1 ad for the Swallow Book Club
- 1 cut-out article about the footballer Gunnar Nordahl
- 1 informational leaflet from Youth Counseling
- 1 Christmas present from dad, a subscription to the Swedish Taxpayers' Association's magazine *Sunt Förnuft*
- 1 annual membership card for Liberal Youth, 1957

- 1 informational postcard from the Social Democrats' Youth Wing
- 1 congratulations card on 16th birthday
- 1 proof of membership in the Swedish Taxpayers' Association
- 1 payment installment reminder for a Husqvarna sewing machine
- 1 letter from the call-in radio program *Ventilen* replying to criticism of the overly talkative host
- 1 photo from the Liberal Party's youth leadership course
- 1 program from the course
- 1 handwritten account of all the bus and train changes required to get to the course
- 1 letter to the parents from the course
- 1 transcript of a school schedule
- 1 handwritten account of the weather in June 1957
- 1 account of the weather in London and southern Europe for the same month
- 1 series of notes from the national school "tournament of everything"
- 1 typewritten report from the tournament
- 1 greeting card for mum's birthday
- 1 letter from the Swedish Teachers' Temperance Association with thanks for submitting a manuscript
- 1 voting card for the 1957 referendum about pensions
- 1 letter from Prime Minister Tage Erlander, addressing comments on high taxation
- 1 brochure from a community college in central Sweden
- 1 postcard to the family with an account of a train journey to Vadstena

Most documents are provided with handwritten notes about date, time, distance, weight, names and locations, Swedish crowns and

pennies. A note attached to a letter reads: "Transferred Sunday 27/7/1980 16:30 to 18:30. Return travel 18:30 to 20:00. Recited Tuesday 4/11/1980 17:00. Confirmed 31/8/1980 20:00."

In binders 2-29, the inventory continues.

### 3

Stockholm Tramways thanks you for your interest in the signs in the subway. We confirm that you have listened to Radio Africa Tangier on frequency 9275 kc/s (32.3 m). Welcome to Liberal Youth. In your motion, you propose to organize a lottery for the benefit of the starving nations. Forward to the congress in Tranås! Not much of interest happened before we arrived in Krylbo at 6:29 am only 3 minutes late and still we only had a D-locomotive to pull the train. Our esteemed headmaster! On behalf of the class I'd like convey to you a heartfelt thanks on this big day. Travel efficiently, use public transportation. Valued crony! Draw a lottery ticket in Liberal Youth's Election-Fiver! If my information is correct, I am entitled to claim 21.21 crowns for having worked as a conductor on your behalf on line 53. BRAVO! You have recruited a new member. I hereby announce that you have been accepted to community college. Dentist's signature below. Good fish to buy are cod and plaice. You are hereby summoned to join the Baptist Youth's Congo Service Corps. You are a city dweller and cannot easily gain insight into rural problems. For this reason I will send you a lottery ticket. Welcome to the annual meeting of the Taxpayers' Association. Please get in touch with Mr. Anderson about the run-over pedestrian. Thank you for supporting the Civil Defense. We cheered for you when you were born and we cheer for you today. This is in light of your concerns about our military officers' incompetence in a future war. How is

everything? Any luck with the ladies? We welcome you as a permanent member of the Taxpayers' Association. The Congo Service Corps now has a large number of participants, yourself included. This ticket is valid for a round trip by bus to Rättvik. To do: a giant edition of *Högerstudenten*. Cordial greetings from central Europe. A cloth snood and pot holders are to be brought with you to the household chores class. You say you have grown tired of the domestic political bickering. Here you are! Your first voting card. Welcome to the Sex and Society conference. Good luck from London! Liberal Forum welcomes you to an evening supper with mp Per Ahlmark. I bow and hand over one of the pink roses that cling outside my window. Because of the unexpected demand for tickets, the Sex and Society conference has been moved to the Great Hall of the Civic House. After passing the bus driver's test, the inspector said about my driving: Whichever way you turn, you should probably have clean teeth. Ultra Brite gets you noticed! In 1953, we started drinking milk in paper bottles. You have registered for the examination in Swedish political science. What do the service employees have to say about this? Latching solenoid valve. Scratching seminal vesicle. I've never liked it here. What is life? What is security? Why am I totally superfluous? Is this life only a pastime? Why am I happiest when I'm asleep? Welcome to therapeutic counseling at the St. Luke Foundation. You mentioned today that you would gladly come again. Welcome to therapeutic counseling at the St. Luke Foundation. Who cares about the passing of time when you are as young as spring? Welcome to the St. Luke Foundation. Please present yourself at the Stockholm Tramways' chest X-ray screening. Welcome to the St. Luke Foundation. The motto of the Swedish Blue-Band Scouts is: Temperance, Christian lifestyle, and physical activity. Since some cases of tuberculosis have been found, we ask

you to present yourself for a new screening. I wish to point out that I always had time off on Christmas Day. Welcome to the St. Luke Foundation. You are welcome to counseling at the St. Luke Foundation. You are welcome here for counseling. At the meeting, we agreed that residential ties will not be a factor for the Liberal Party in Stockholm. Younger employees wanted for our insurance department. CALL THEM! I command you! Yours faithfully, Per Ahlmark. The evening class in automotive engineering is postponed until further notice. But we passed through Kumla with speed, at least 80 or 90 kilometers per hour. Since nothing much else of interest happened, I ate my meal while reading conference papers. Almost across from me sat a disgusting girl. I lost my appetite as soon as I ~~looked~~ happened to look at her. I find that an injured man, doomed to become an invalid, should be left to rest in peace and not be resurrected to a literal hell. Must human life really be saved at all costs? The extraordinarily serious problem you present, which was also heavily debated under the Nazi regime in Germany, seems inappropriate to us to be discussed in *Svenska Dagbladet*. Brother, congratulations on your political driver's license!! Welcome to the Youth and Education Council's annual meeting. Welcome to the St. Luke Foundation. I have signed you up for the Christian Communities' sobriety course. Your letter was not particularly flattering. Surely our coverage of the Vasa ski race wasn't *that* bad? Sincerely, Sven Jerring, Swedish Radio. As you heard in the course, I started with booze at the early age of 16. In a shop 100 meters from the station they sell pajamas for around 20 crowns. You should not taste even a drop of spirits, for you never know what might happen. We welcome you as a member of the Swedish Tram Society. You must not have any such thoughts, that if you were to drink a few drops, you would be able to speak about the sufferings of an

alcoholic. I would like to say a spontaneous thanks for your excellent book *Kärlek, vänskap och äktenskap*, especially for the thorough and objective description of how INTERCOURSE and CONCEPTION occur. Referring to motions 13, 18, and 25, I propose the introduction of bigamy in Sweden. If what you write is true, that the Liberal Youth club's continued existence is at stake, I think you should make sure to be the club chairman yourself. Congratulations on your driver's license. Many thanks for the help. Happy Birthday! Thank you for volunteering to help distribute the Liberal Party's ballots. We meet and thrive at the Free Christian High School Movement club. Welcome to the Free Church Council's meeting. The undersigned, summoned for military service in mid-October 1960, asks for answers to the following questions: Any luck with the ladies? Did the Student Council ever receive a large cupboard? *How will we live and what will we do in the year 2000? Come see for yourself at AMERICA'S SPACE AGE WORLD'S FAIR, Seattle, U.S.A.!* We are pleased to have signed you up for the Systematic Bible Memorization course. The Taxpayers' Association invites you to its 40th anniversary. Bank Manager Jacob Wallenberg will be present. The Blue-Bandists have decided to celebrate the anniversary with song and prayer. It is not without a tear shed. We sincerely hope that you want to give your continued support to the Red Cross. **NOW YOU CAN WASH YOUR CAR AND HAVE IT CLEANED AND POLISHED AT THE SAME TIME!** The funds thus received are intended as the seed for the expansion of the Art Society. It's time for the oral test in your matriculation examination. Stockholm Tramways requests that from now on you arrive to work on time. We would also like to thank you for your generous gift to Sweden Helps. You have passed LIBERAL COMPASS. The bus to Falkenberg departs at 22:00 sharp. Congrats! Congrats! Congrats!

Cordial greetings to the man who all of a sudden earned the white cap! F2. Hard drills, pesky commands. Food is decent. I love Stockholm. Hola! You have requested the 1962 group photo of the 3rd platoon. Unfortunately, none are left. The Traffic Committee has not been able to approve your suggestions for improvement. Regarding your letter of resignation, please contact Ms. Larsson immediately. Greetings from the province of Jämtland. In 1966, the first color television broadcast was transmitted to the general public. We commit for the next 6 months to fix any problems that may arise with your new REMA typewriter. To the members of the Swedish Road Association. Bye for now! You may keep in touch. Greetings from Leningrad. Save the ticket for any inspections that may occur during the journey. Stockholm Tramways hereby requests that you turn in your preliminary tax declaration immediately. But first a lottery ticket from *Dagens Nyheter!* The Lions Club's fundraiser lottery will take place on April 29th. Welcome to the annual meeting of the Taxpayers' Association. Greetings from Majorca, Spain. You are hereby summoned to a medical examination. Vaccination for smallpox? Paratyphoid fever? We cordially welcome you to Club 33 Youth Travel. Nice straw hat of a continental type. Practical inflatable beach bag and beach pillow. Select what you want to order. If, according to local custom, you leave a small amount of gratuity for the staff, they will be very happy. Arrived yesterday. Everything okay. Stop forwarding mail. It takes at least three days for it to arrive here. We are pleased to receive your gift in support of the Salvation Army's work. Greetings from England. Stockholm Public Transport requests that you immediately settle the discrepancy in the accounting of the ticket cash register. Greetings from the E4—Sweden's most beautiful highway. Welcome to the Stockholm Brass Band's board meeting. Greetings from

beautiful Dalecarlia in winter attire. Hello! Feel free to pop by the pizzeria in Örebro. Merry Christmas from Lilly. We welcome you to the Swimmers' Association swim class. Season's Greetings from J. & J.L. Sanso Systema, Palma de Majorca. Save the Children would like to thank you for your gift. Due to particular circumstances, you are once again requested to hand in the cash register consignment sealed with a strip. Hi! Your personal ad "City Guy" in *Dagens Nyheter* made me curious, as it was the shortest ad I've ever read! Subscribe to *Reader's Digest*! Hello "City Boy"! Since your ad was so laconic, I really don't know anything about you, except that you are looking to meet a girl and apparently live or grew up in a big city. Would that city be Stockholm or what?? Everybody's Letter Club is a modern, practical way to make new friends. We have taken the liberty to answer your personal ad as we are flooded with new female members every day. For a small payment we will send you some 100 addresses for ladies. Hey you "City Guy"! If I described myself as a "second-rater with severe compulsions" (I did not!), you responded by not giving me any description at all. Are you that awful (looking)?? Welcome as a member of the Men's Rights' Association. You are hereby invited to the Men's Rights' meeting at chairman Stig Möller's home. Your payment request for 12 minutes of overtime cannot be granted. Your request for compensation for taking 10 minutes less during your break cannot be granted. The undersigned hereby informs you that he resigns from his position at Stockholm Public Transport, effective immediately. Dear Friend. I was given the opportunity to travel in Europe this summer, and that was one of the happiest experiences I have ever had. I cannot forget the kindness you showed me on the train. I believe that such friendship may be the clue to be enlarged to the peace and happiness between nations. Yours sincerely, Yukio

Sase (the Japanese Professor). Be informed that you have passed the exam at the Örebro Social Work College. You write that you did not like the bustle of Stockholm. But damn you if you "lay off the ladies"! Stig Möller, the following amounts are due and payable. Stig Möller, the following amounts are due and payable. Stig Möller, the following amounts are due and payable. Thank you for taking care of the bills / Stig. Congratulations on the launch of the Men's Rights' Association in Örebro. / Stig. Thank you for your application for a position as a driver at Trafik-Bore. But seriously, your way of dealing with the proposal on improved student democracy was completely undemocratic, eccentric, and horrifying. Thank you for your feedback on the epa shopping mall. Welcome to the Students-in-Shape Association! Subscribe to *Reader's Digest* today and get a free issue! Stockholm Public Transport hereby confirms your reinstatement as an extra holiday bus driver. The city of Sousse. So glad I don't have to put up with Majorca. Hello! I ended up in Tunisia. Did NOT want to go to Majorca again. Only half-drunk Swedes on every other corner. When it comes to sexuality I'm probably still a bit too aggressive. Another interesting question: what am I most interested in: getting married or becoming a member of parliament? Now I'm fully focused on completing the documentation of the 1960s by December 31st. I am a girl of 26 who wants to become familiar with a boy. Reply to "Non-Smoker." Called her 12/19/69 20:22- 20:28. She rang 12/24/69 16:40-16:50. Called her 3/10/70 22:00-22:05. THE END. Rejected! Je vous remercie beaucoup la lettre que vous avez envoyé dans la quella il ya 4 ballons. Welcome to Stockholm. Thank you for sending me your new address. Call me tonight / Terttu. I have gratefully taken note of your observations concerning Sapphire Grocers' prices. Welcome to dinner. Is there a particular kind of food or drink that you

like? /Terttu. Dear Friend. Thank you so much for your letter. I'll never forget when I met you on the bus. You were so kind to show me various places in Stockholm. It was August 3, 1968. Got to read your letter to my father yesterday. I totally understand what hardships I have put you through. Apologies for having made your life such a hell /Terttu. Greetings from "Sunny Beach" (Sonnenbad) /Olle. Subscribe to *Reader's Digest* today! I DO NOT HAVE THE TIME FOR OR ANY INTEREST IN YOUR OFFERS. DELETE ALL MY ADDRESSES FROM YOUR REGISTERS. ROGER THAT? Your letter surprised us. Anyone who has been generous and helpful enough to lend "an old friend" a few crowns now and then is usually also generous enough to wait until his friend CAN pay him back, rather than send scandalizing letters to parents and authorities... We hereby certify that all addresses have been removed from our registers. Here you are! A special offer from *Svensk Damtidning*. The older I get, the more I enjoy being neither married nor engaged, and I don't find it urgent at all to find a girl. The Executive Committee of the Swedish Blue-Band Scouts has decided to repay you 6.50 for food at the annual meeting of 1967, as it's one person's word against another's. Repaid for lack of evidence. About yourself you write nothing. I have found another room to rent starting New Year's. Greetings, Ingeborg. After sending letters as insolent and stupid as this, one usually repents. I therefore return to you your correspondence, especially as we here at the parish office in Rättvik do not have the slightest to do with your national registration. Jesus wants to help you. Jesus is coming soon! Be on guard! I want to thank you for your expressed interest in the Center Party Youth. Although I am of the female sex, I dare to write you a few lines. Greetings, Karin (interested neither in gossip or home decoration but actually in real politics). The decision of the Swedish

Blue-Band Scouts was that you with your current opinions cannot be allowed to remain a member. A Blue-Bandist must, according to our rules, abstain from all alcoholic beverages. Subscribe to *Reader's Digest* today! REMOVE MY ADDRESS FROM YOUR REGISTERS!!!!!! Dear Friend. I am glad to hear you are quite well. I am also in fine health. I still have the ticket you gave me in that bus. It has such signs: "8-3 Typ 100 sl. Får ej överlåtas. Uppvisas vid kontroll. 1:-." Very sincere friend in Japan. We're so happy to get a letter from you. It was not expected, since you let us know that women are of so little value. You say you have suffered hell from women, and it could be because you so bluntly speak your mind about them. It probably doesn't make anyone happy to hear how useless they are, and chances are that they will bite back. Hey, if you feel like writing again, please tell us something about yourself and your interests (other than girls). / Your female fan club in Mora. In 1978, we got a fifth vacation week. Avis in Norrland—we go out of our way when you need to rent a car. Welcome to the introductory course on budgeting. Season's Greetings from the Sases, Japan. We invite you to participate in the new exciting contest from *Reader's Digest*! I DO NOT HAVE THE TIME! You write that you don't care about girls, but I don't believe you. You probably have a little hootchy-kootchy going on from time to time. /Sven Jerring, Swedish Radio

#### 4

Postcards, shipping fees tables, banknotes. A chocolatebar wrapper. Dishcloths. As time goes by, the archive grows into an intimate inventory of the mysteriousness of things and of life's empty, lonely core.

Year adds to year, disappointment to disappointment. The replies to the personals in *Dagens Nyheter* become increasingly aggressive. I myself have become a genuine misogynist, but write to me once and we'll see. We can exchange photos the next time. I am responding to your ad, as it deviates a little from the usual vulgar outcries for a charming tango cavalier. Are you an independent woman? Thank God, for they are rare! Can you shut up for six to seven hours? I've had enough of women who keep gossiping and chattering for hours. I can be thoroughly pissed off, even at women. I fully agree with those who believe that women are the most unnecessary thing there is. Write to me ONCE and we'll see. Photos can be exchanged the next time.

Letters are written but never sent. Better let it be so as to avoid all the trouble that comes with it.

The letters to the Swedish Radio, the Swedish Armed Forces, the College of Arts, the County Administrative Board in Skåne, the Swedish Ice Hockey Association, and the Swedish Mahjong Association, to various ladies in the Stockholm area, family and friends, become more and more gnarly, brusque, and sarcastic. GIVE THEM HELL.

The replies get shorter and shorter. Why these constant allusions to "the girls"? Please skip the unnecessary taunts and provocations. Your letter is outrageous. We will not respond to more absurd accusations.

Conflicts arise. With authorities, friends, and family. With party comrades, associations, women. Why do I even bother talking back to this person???. The conflicts are typically followed by long and bitter disputes rather than reconciliation. Never reconciliation. PLEASE. STAY ABROAD. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PLANET. FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.

The lists of Christmas and New Year's cards received get shorter

with every passing year. More and more, the Japanese professor comes across as the one true friend. Even as the professor's memories start swirling together, like water in a whirlpool, he kindly and mildly replies to all holiday greetings. I'm an old man now, but I still keep the ticket you gave me in Amsterdam. I still remember your kindness that day in London. You were very helpful on that boat in your city. I remember with great pleasure the year I met you. I will never forget our meeting in Paris.

From the early 1980s, when the Average Swede project begins, the accumulation of the world becomes more and more hectic. Shipping fees tables, wage statistics, facts about the Swedish Road Administration, a letter from the City Archives. Since you are the only one who asked to look at these archives recently, we must ask you if you somehow brought them home with you? If that is the case, we ask you to promptly return the files to the archive. The matter will otherwise be handed over to the police.

Cut-out newspaper articles, some fifty lottery tickets from the Swedish Aviation Lottery, protocols from the local parish council, a letter from The Blue-Band Scouts. Brother, I'm told that you have taken away parts of our archives in order to "organize them" for us. If this is true, there must be a misunderstanding. That would require a decision by the Board, and there is no such decision. We therefore ask you to return the missing materials as soon as possible.

Facts about the municipality of Sundbyberg, local, regional, and national ballots for all political parties, death and birth announcements from the daily papers, a letter from the Swallows' Developing Countries' Association. The Swallows' Peru division needs its account books back, the ones that were stolen by you. Letters and accusations back and forth. Letters from the police. Summons for questioning. A court verdict. Daily fines.

A TV and radio license registration form, a postcard of the Royal Guard at the Royal Palace, a black-and-white photograph. The man in the picture radiates a sluggish, heavy authority. Big round face with coarse and grumpy features. Cheeks sagging a little.

Black hair embellished with sideburns, a lock of hair glued to the forehead. An eye lazily lifted in contempt toward the camera. The photograph is attached to a letter addressed to a lady. This picture is probably better suited for criminal records than to send home to your mom. Unfortunately, I couldn't get you a better one, due to the circumstances.

Dutch flower seeds, an invitation to the Subway Builders' topping-off party, three banknotes with a handwritten note: New unfolded ten-crown notes from the post office at Vasagatan, collected on Tuesday, November 27, 1984 at 15:45. A letter from the Swallows' Developing Countries' Association: the account books of the Peru division have disappeared once again.

Scores of letters. Dear son, we have never asked for any money. We return the banknotes that you had enclosed in the envelope. Thank you for your concern, but Sapphire Groceries can manage without subsidies. Keep your tenners.

One of the last documents in binder 29, a single line on a postcard: Wondering how you are doing.

## 5

The rest of the archive—maybe three or four hundred binders—is more difficult to grasp, as the binders are completely unmarked. Some of them appear to be thematically arranged. One contains documents from his military service in the Swedish Royal Air Force. Another from the Congo Service Corps. There's a binder from uni-

versity and one from the Liberal Youth club. There's the Swallows' account books, the Blue-Band Scouts' archives, and scattered fragments from a long line of city archives from his various places of residence. There's also archival material belonging to the Swedish Country District's Youth Association, the Swedish Physical Culture Association, the Home Guard, and the Swedish Tram Society. In a binder packed with personal ads—some of them with attached response letters—there's a receipt from Bergman's Passport Photos. Do not trouble him anymore. A hundred and fifty photos, that should suffice. It appears as if the numbered binders, rather than a completed whole, are just a scratch on the surface, a gentle introduction to what is to come. A brief Collection Summary.

Some twenty binders are filled with papers from his fourteen years as an employee of Stockholm Transport starting in 1970, first as a bus driver, then as a ticket collector, a turnstile worker, and finally, a passenger counter. Fare and distance tables, traffic directors' orders, stamp samples, time indication tables, instructions for turnstile workers, phone check schedules, exploded views of the subway, inventory data, forms for manual passenger counts. Odenplan, 1 boarded; Sveavägen, 2 boarded... Sometimes with personal notes. Sympathetic atmosphere on the way home. Twenty-two formal proposals for staff room improvements, all of them declined. Periodical reconciliation forms, drawings of the staff areas, day-off schedules, overtime records, addresses, lists of travelers entering and exiting the turnstile, notices, pay slips, song books, invitations to staff parties, field reports. Arriving at Slussen bus 435 route 16 at 14:10. Take the bus out, last bit on foot. Have been thinking about doing this again in the early morning. Radio not working, garage contact via phone booth. Radio-equipped car no. 8916 arriving at 17:45. It takes me + lady from Kopparmora and gentleman at Saltarövägen

stop to Gustavsberg's Centrum. Arrival at 17:56 or with my stopwatch 28 minutes after departure from Saltarö Strand. Many of the documents have been photocopied on a Xerox machine, some up to fifteen times.

But above all, the binders are full of irritation, conflicts, and bitter disputes. shit fuck shit fuck shit sh shit. In particular, it's the first office assistant Björn Barr who is the cause of much of the friction. But also the constantly tipsy witch Solbritt who does nothing but smoke, gossip, and play background radio music all day long.

Björn just talks and talks. Do we really need ALL THAT TALKING? Brusquely reprimanded by Björn

Barr ... more barking from Barr ... threatened with relocation by Barr ... told off by Barr ... and then Björn Barr was at me again ... lots of whining over little things like my absence from work on Sept 3, 4, 7, 8 ... NO driver has ever thrown me off the bus, no matter how much Björn Barr says so. Scolded like a dog by Björn Barr. Barr. Barr. Barr. And Solbritt, can she not stay sober? I move that Solbritt be suspended from Stockholm Transport for all time.

Accusations are met by counter-accusations. Barr said that some drivers had complaints against the passenger counter ... Several drivers want to see the counter's "head on a platter," according to Barr ... Barr said that all of the counter's suggestions ought to be thrown into the trash immediately ...

Numerous requests for reassignment, sick leave, and leaves of absence. Petitions and letters of protest. Against Barr. Against Solbritt. Against smoking, background music, and transistor radios. We who sign this belong to the field group in the Manual Passenger Counting, Traffic Calculator section. We believe that Björn Barr's mood and temperament ... Many of us have been greatly abused ... I refer to my earlier complaints ... on MY SHIFT! ... Jesus fucking

Christ ... Are you deliberately pissing me off?? Letters of resignation. Withdrawals of previously submitted resignations.

Overslept. Ill. Nausea. Didn't go to work. Vomiting. Took leave. Please call the office as you didn't care to come in on Friday. Reprimands. Warnings. Summons to suitability tests and medical examinations. The brochure "About Psychological Tests." Doctor's journals. Lives alone, introverted, wary of contact.

Accident reports. Incidents. The woman says she felt threatened when she met a shirtless, unknown man ... an incident at the office ... was scolded like hell ... threw her off the train ... a violent dispute ... cross fire from all directions ... intermezzo at the Central Station ... called for the police ...

I react strongly against background music and radio transistors. A dispute arose with the bus driver. I do not remember exactly what was said. I'm sitting in a café car on the train. Some men have a transistor radio turned up pretty loud. I was annoyed. Rowdyism and heavy drinking on the bus. Of course I got annoyed. No comment. No comment.

Still, the thematically arranged binders constitute but a fraction of the lot. The overwhelming majority of unlabeled binders have no obvious organizing principle at all, and even less a discriminatory one. The material is crammed higgledy-piggledy, and increasingly chaotically. Almanacs for blood donors, a summons to the police station in Solna, a hundred empty sheets of letter paper. Notes concerning the installation of a wire radio. A preorder for a traditional Dalecarlia costume.

A letter from the Ombudsman for Equality. A letter from Palamin, in the Gambia. A letter from the Ministry of Agriculture. A letter from the National Archive of Sweden, displaying amounting reluctance to accept more material for the archive. They no longer want

to recognize the project, and speak of an acute shortage of space, of priorities, of complaints from scientists in the research room. And yet they don't really seem to have the heart to shut down the project. The archive just keeps growing.

Your marathon poster is ready for pick up. We welcome you in the name of the good Lord. An envelope marked "The only Christmas card this year!" We're afraid the right to a burial spot cannot be purchased "in advance." Fuck you then. At sea with MS *Gurli*. A letter from Charlestown. A letter from the Hotel Troja Bunga outside of Banjul in the Gambia, West Africa. A letter from us president Ronald Reagan.

The conflicts continue. During a visit to the archive a few days ago, I found FOUR BOXES WITH UNKNOWN MATERIALS in tray no. 13, lower shelf. IS IT YOU WHO HAS SUBMITTED MATERIALS TO THE ARCHIVE WITHOUT NOTIFYING ME? I remember a very serious conversation over the phone when I MADE IT VERY CLEAR THAT YOU MAY NOT GO INTO THE ARCHIVE WITHOUT ME!

Conflicts escalate. I seem to recall that you spoke of "a few papers" that you wanted me to have a look at and decide if they were of value to the archive. So I was a bit surprised this morning. Please explain to me why there are THREE PAPER BAGS and A TOTALLY FULL BOX—APPROX. 8 KG—with unknown material in the archives!

Dear friend of the Jokkmokk Museum! In 1986, Prime Minister Olof Palme was assassinated in central Stockholm after walking home from a cinema with his wife. Pick up your travel money at the post office. Greetings from Norrland—the province of colors. An application for membership in the Swedish-Gambian Association. The brochure "The Municipal Computer Center in Västerås."

Postcards from the Vasaloppet cross-country ski race, two stamps please!

Conflicts arise afresh. I was caught by surprise this morning, when I found a new load of material in the archive. I wonder who the malicious "FRIEND" could be, who put it there to harm my work and perhaps ruin the end result completely, after a few thousand hours of work?

Facts about the province of Värmland, a list of board members of the School Inspection Authority (note the FEMALE dominance). We welcome you to the Board Meeting of the Swedish-Gambian Association. Swim and win a car in "The Great Splash." Your employment at Stockholm Transport will be officially terminated on May 18, 1984. We wish you luck in your search for new employment.

From this point forward, a sense of anxiety sneaks into the archive. Suspicions. Hunches. Forebodings.

Björn Barr and Solbritt. It's them who are behind this. And now everyone is calling me crazy and avoiding me.

Binders filled with medical reports. Fatigue, dizziness, and fainting. Legs that can no longer carry the body. I'm so sick, it's as if all my muscles were located below the knees. CANNOT STRAIGHTEN MY BACK ANYMORE.

The hunches and suspicions branch out to paranoia, which in some mysterious way seems closely associated with the archive itself. All these documents about me seem to lie open somewhere. and around me only people who seem to know everything about me. Totally absurd how my journals leak. they have barely been written before someone in the waiting room allude to them. Isn't it strange they always know where i am??

Contact with the psychiatric services becomes more frequent. More and more receipts from the pharmacy. More and more pre-

scription drugs. Letters and reminders from the Swedish Enforcement Authority and various other debt collection agencies. Letters from Anticimex pest control. Notes left at the door by enforcement officers. We have sought you in vain today... Complaints from the neighbors. Warnings from the landlord. Contact information for the housing agency. EVICTED!!

Homeless and without a place to go, there seems to be no choice but to follow the usual routine. Considerably irritated letters from the National Archive show that a young temporary receptionist has somehow been persuaded to accept his household effects into the archive, goods that are transferred in batches, hauled in a shopping cart. Despite numerous requests, he refuses to remove his stuff and the whole lot somehow ends up in a storage room in the basement.

Receipts from homeless shelters. Receipt for a bread loaf from the Brommaplan subway convenience store. References to emergency accommodation and subsidized housing. Medical records. Schematic diagram of a fully automatic alarm system. Letters with travel documents from Omar Salleh, the Libyan Embassy, Banjul, the Gambia. Notes. Seems to be linked a long way back. but it's now that I'm being chased and cannot breathe. hunted down massively now. in all districts. Stayed elsewhere two nights. The first night nothin happend they did not have the time but the second night I got more poisoned. must find a place to sleep.

Depression, resignation, and disappointment with life. Things could have been so great. had every chance but am now so sick from these toxins I doubt I'll live much longer. Appartly had zero friends when it came to the crunch.

Loneliness and despair. Does no one want to see me anymore. violent chills and cannot walk. End close. Excruciating pains all over all over and most of all in the heart. I'm dead sick. Poisoned.

heavily poisoned. burning with caustic soda ... Everything tastes salty. As if someone had poured salt in my whole body.

Poisoned in my residence. through pipes and fans. all the ones I have named n yes it was carried out by those I mentiond.

Contacts with the authorities. Placement in a group home. Days spent in libraries around the city and in the archive's research room sorting and organizing. Now I have them all around me. and he next to me is reading about water intoxication. Everyone goes to bookshelves they couldn't care less about.

Sensitive letters and photographs are removed from the binders, while constantly new material is added. Photocopied book pages and transcripts from reference books on the most diverse subjects: chemistry, mushroom cultivation, transportation, gangrene, pogroms, heavy metal, books about the deeper and secret connections between things. Reality and imagination flow together, like water in water. Everyone around me plays the game. a man starts to twitch his hands and clears his throat to spit another has returned to stare at me and of course the bag lady who follows me pops up, pretending to be an academic. This is an occult crime! the biggest satanic murder ever. Binder after binder filled with desultory notes that each year become more and more twisted and distorted. Proposals to let a trained archivist review and cull the collection are firmly rejected. I WILL NOT TAKE YOUR ADVICE!!!

When the last shelf in the archive is full, the material is discreetly carried down to the storage room in the basement, together with the bags of unsorted material—apparently collected on solitary night walks—that are found every other morning outside the entrance. A newspaper placard from 7-Eleven. A crumpled toffee wrapper. A messy ice cream bar. A song torn out of a book at the library.

*May each day  
be a day filled with love  
May each day  
be a day filled with song  
And may every day of our lives be beautiful  
and give us something to remember one day.*

Over the years, the storage room has become a kitchen midden of greasy pots and pans, bags of old clothes, shoes and moldy towels. Broken watches, wellthumbed bus and train schedules. A toothbrush with sprawling bristles, a cracked bar of soap. Expired cough syrups and expectorants, package leaflets and warranty cards, an almost completely squeezed-out tube of Swedish cream cheese. Everything we wanted to tell you about. Remember. Preserve. Share.

*How will you live and what will you do in the year 2000? Come see for yourself at AMERICA'S SPACE AGE WORLD'S FAIR, Seattle, U.S.A.!*



*Redrawing of an illustration found in the archive of the Average Swede. The Swedish text reads: "A letter means so much when it comes to contact between people."*

## *Food and drink Consumed*

Tuesday, 17 January 2017

11:00 pm *two milliliters of e-juice*

11:25 pm *snus tobacco*

Wednesday, 18 January 2017

1:34 am *juice, dark chocolate, tangerine*

2:15 am *two glucose tablets*

3:34 am *cigarette*

4:14 am *e-juice refill*

5:05 am *nuts and dried berries*

8:55 am *coffee, two cheese sandwiches, yogurt with raspberries*

9:00 am *cigarette*

9:20 am *snus tobacco*

10:56 am *e-juice refill*

11:44 am *cigarette 1*

2:59 pm *baked sweet potatoes, red quinoa salad, chipotle cream cheese, roasted pumpkin seeds, spinach*

1:46 pm *coffee, cigarette*

2:18 pm *cigarette*

2:46 pm *glucose tablet*

3:23 pm *e-juice refill*

6:30 pm *vegetable juice*

7:05 pm *e-juice refill*

7:38 pm *cigarette*

## *Titles of Swedish publications and programs*

The names of Swedish institutions mentioned in the text have been translated for ease of comprehension, using, whenever possible,

the official translations offered by the institutions themselves. The titles of Swedish publications and programs, however, have been retained. A literal translation of these names is offered below.

*Dagens Nyheter* The Day's News (daily newspaper)

*Folket i Bild* The People in Pictures (periodical)

*Högerstudenten* The Right-Wing Student (periodical)

*Kärlek, vänskap och äktenskap* Love, Friendship, and Marriage  
(book)

*Sunt Förnuft* Common Sense (periodical)

*Svensk Damtidning* The Swedish Women's Magazine (periodical)

*Svenska Dagbladet* The Swedish Daily Paper (daily newspaper)

*Ventilen* The Valve (radio program)



The author wishes to thank Inbal Mizrach, Sina Najafi, and Jeffrey Kastner for their assistance with the English translation; Yuvinka Medina for organizing everything so meticulously; Theodor Ringborg for all his help and for keeping him company throughout the writing of this book; Sara Arrhenius for her support of this project; and Carsten Höller for letting him rest in one of his *Two Roaming Beds (Grey)* (2015).

First published by Cabinet Books 2017. Published here with permission from Immaterial Incorporated/Cabinet.