In Memoriam

Bo Göran Lennart Bergqvist

18 November 1945 – 28 September 2021

Roger D. Thorne

The Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society lost a friend and colleague with the death of Bo Bergqvist on September 28, 2021.

I had the good fortune of first meeting Bo and his wife Ragnhild in the summer of 2011 at Valley Forge National Historic Park. Most early mornings find me hiking across the hills and forests of what is referred to as "Mt. Misery," and a trail ascent found me approaching two women, one of whom I could hear speaking with a delightful Swedish accent. Because my late mother was Swedish, I considered introducing myself at that moment, but was hesitant to intrude on their animated conversation. But after passing the pair on several subsequent mornings, an exchange did begin with the women introducing themselves as Ragnhild Bergqvist and her longtime friend Peggy Franck. I happened to mention that I was a member of the local historical society, and immediately Ragnhild exclaimed: "My husband would especially like to meet you. He loves history."

And so I was soon to meet Bo Bergqvist. A morning or two later the familiar duo had now become a trio … or a quartet if one counts the large and powerful dalmatian named "Alfie" walking beside the tall, broad-shouldered man with the bright blue eyes. A firm handshake, and I immediately felt that I had just met a new friend. Standing beside the trail in conversation, I soon learned that Bo and I were almost precisely the same age, were both recently retired from business careers, and both loved history, travel, cooking and fine wine. A good start.

I was to learn a great deal about Bo's very interesting and productive life. He grew up in Linköping, Sweden's fifth largest city, and after completing his two year military service he pursued his economics degree at the University of Gothenburg. In 1968 Bo joined SKF Group — one of the world's largest producers of bearings, seals, lubrication systems, and other related technology and services — and earned financial roles of increasing responsibility. In 1986 he accepted a two year assignment with SKF in their U.S. operation, and the family moved to Chesterbrook. But as the end of this two-year commitment approached, Bo and Ragnhild realized that not only were his career options more diverse in the U.S., but that their children were thriving here. They therefore decided that they should stay in the U.S. Bo retired from SKF in 2010 as Vice President of Finance for SKF North America.

In that summer of 2011 I told Bo that our Society was currently on summer vacation, but would resume its monthly meeting schedule in September. Bo and Ragnhild immediately joined the TEHS as Patron members, and for the next several years were among our most regular meeting attendees. Bo was soon asked to join the Society's audit committee, and served with distinction along with colleague Duane Malm in this critically-important oversight function.

One of my favorite memories of working directly with Bo on a project was the planning and executing of a very special Summer Program in August 2019. Early that year Bo had shared his wish to sponsor a program that would emphasize that the lesser-known New Sweden Colony had been established in the Delaware Valley in 1638 — decades before the Penn Grant was decreed in 1681. We decided to hold the event at the American Swedish Historical Museum (ASHM) in Philadelphia, where Bo had served as board chair from 2016 through 2018 and Ragnhild had been influential in so many ways. Along with the personal participation of ASHM's Executive Director, Tracey Beck, the aspects of arranging a qualified speaker and the many other details were in process of completion when the unthinkable happened. In May, 2019 Ragnhild, Bo's beloved wife of 52 years, unexpectedly died of a long-term illness while the two were visiting Sweden. When I heard the devastating news from Bo, I remember thinking that it would be just too painful for him to proceed with our August schedule. But Bo would not hear of that, and so whatever pain he carried during that event, that event remains for many one of the very best historical programs the Society has ever sponsored. Thank you, Bo, well done.

Bo is survived by his daughters Ingrid and Karin, his son Olof, and four grandchildren.

Roger D. Thorne is a past president of the Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society.

The photographs on the opposite page show:
(LEFT) Ragnhild and Bo dancing together in November 2016, and
(RIGHT) Bo proudly displaying a large crab that will soon become the main course. — *Courtesy of the Bergqvist Family Collection*

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