

A SWEDE ABROAD

*Agneta Nilsson*

Swedish citizens who live abroad founded an organization over 50 years ago called *Utlandssvenskarnas Förening* (The Association of Swedes Abroad). This organization advocates for the rights of its members, Swedes who have made new homes in other parts of the world but who still retain their Swedish allegiance and citizenship. It also combats the image (as often painted in the Swedish press) that these Swedes live in luxury abroad, far from the reach of the Swedish tax authorities.

When *Utlandssvenskarnas Förening* decided to celebrate its 50th anniversary in June, 1988, it turned to one of its California members, Agneta Nilsson. It knew that it could count on her to mobilize Swedes around the world to come to Stockholm for four days the week before Midsummer to discuss issues of common concern, to celebrate their organizational milestone, and to show their fellow Swedes

residing in Sweden just how much good they do for their homeland.

In choosing Agneta the organization made a smart choice. She has lived in California since 1961 when she met a fellow Swede — husband Gunnar — and settled down to raise two sons. Her introduction to the United States had been as a Rotary stipend recipient followed by a stint working at the United Nations before heading west.

Agneta Nilsson's quiet life as a California housewife wasn't enough to keep her from looking for other things to do. She brought over her loom and began weaving. On frequent visits home to Sweden (Gunnar works for SAS) she noticed how many things were only available in Sweden. Soon she was in the import business, specializing in jewelry. Her firm, Agneta Imports, now deals primarily in amber, the orange-yellow fossilized resin that has been sought after from

Scandinavia since at least Viking times. Another business venture, Liaison Agneta, is a consulting company offering services (everything from conference arranging to translation ability) to Scandinavian business executives in California.

Agneta's inability to sit still has meant that this month Swedish women from across the United States and around the world will gather in Manhattan Beach to celebrate the tenth anniversary of SWEA — the Swedish Women's Educational Association, Inc. In 1979 Agneta started the very first chapter of the organization in that southern California community. It was an attempt to bring together Swedish women living in this country, most of them married to American men and most of them feeling very isolated, both from Sweden and from the American mainstream.

Agneta's organizing and public relations genius has enabled SWEA to celebrate this happy ten-year benchmark with appropriate fanfare. Her skills made it possible for *Utlandssvenskarnas Förening* to hold a highly successful four-day 50th anniversary conference which was lucky enough to take place on one of the most beautiful weekends of the Stockholm summer last year. An art show, a seminar, a concert at the Royal Palace, and a gala banquet at Stockholm's City Hall for 1100 guests (from 40 countries) in the presence of the King, followed by an all-day event at Skansen, gave both Swedes in Sweden and Swedes living abroad ample demonstrations of Agneta's abilities.

It is a lucky organization that can woo her to take time from her family and business responsibilities and give it a hand with an event. If she says "yes", you can relax — it will get done and it will get done well.



Agneta Nilsson with husband Gunnar and sons Lars and Pelle.