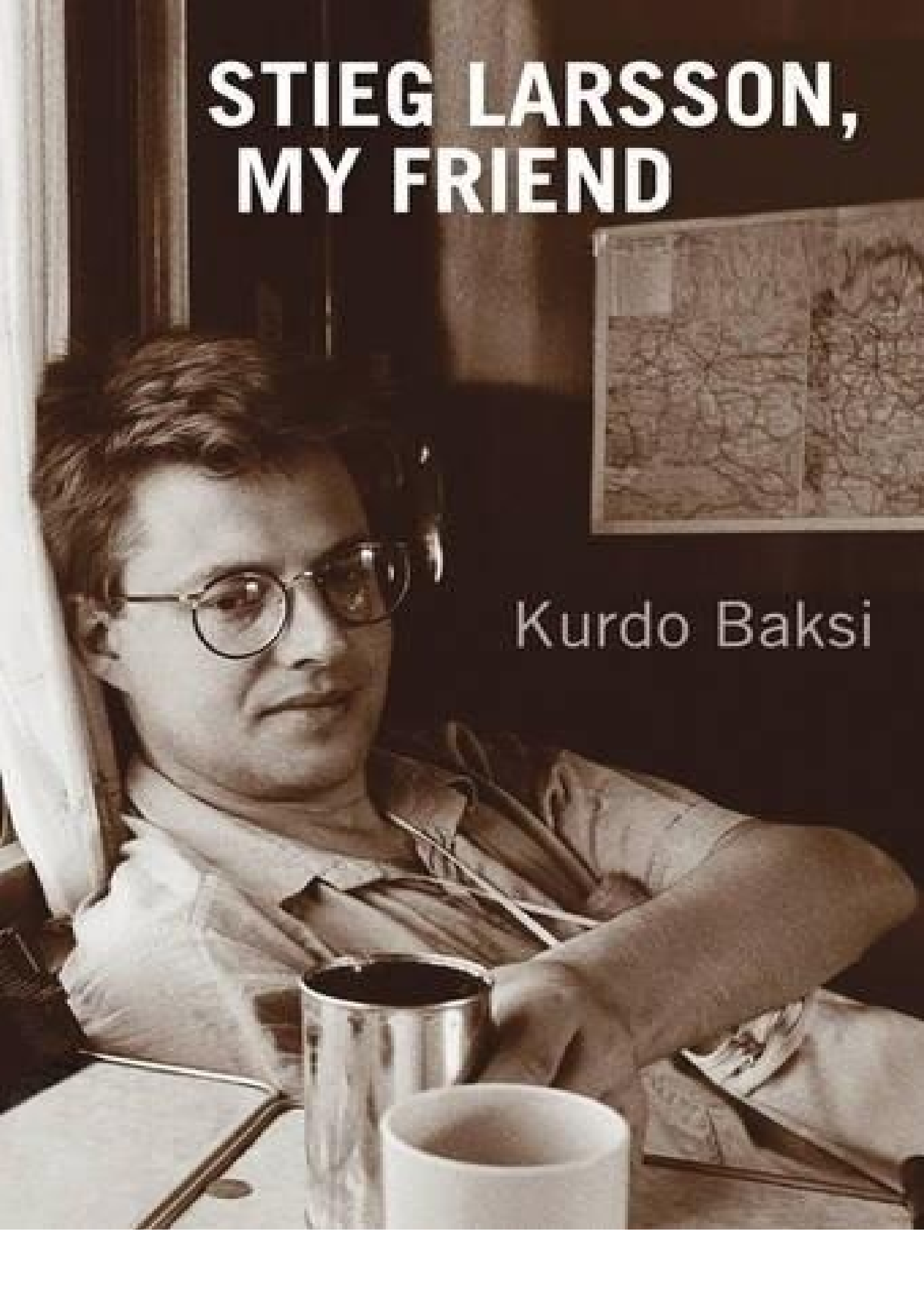


# STIEG LARSSON, MY FRIEND

Kurdo Baksi



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*Translated from the Swedish by Laurie Thompson*

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## The end and a beginning

Stieg Larsson's funeral took place on Friday, 10 December, 2004, in the Chapel of the Holy Cross Forest Cemetery in southern Stockholm. The chapel was packed with relatives, friends and acquaintances. We filed past the coffin to pay our respects. Most of us whispered a final message as we walked slowly past the bier.

On the back of the order of service was a poem by Raymond Carver, "Late Fragment", from the collection he completed shortly before his death:

And did you get what  
you wanted from this life, even so?  
I did.  
And what did you want?  
To call myself beloved, to feel myself  
beloved on the earth.

When Carver was asked how he wanted to be remembered, he replied, "I can think of nothing better than to have been called an author." Not many of the congregation in the chapel that afternoon would have realized that the same applied to Stieg. That he would be remembered as the author of one of the biggest, least expected publishing successes of modern times. For most of us he was a tireless hero in the fight against racism – there was no battle for democracy and equality that he was unwilling to take part in. He was aware that there was a high price attached to doing so, but it was a price he was prepared to pay. The constant threats, the lack of financial resources and the sleepless nights. It was this struggle that shaped his whole life.

But Stieg became an author – thanks to the capriciousness of life and death – only when he was no longer with us.

That afternoon we attended an uplifting memorial ceremony at the Workers' Educational Association in Stockholm, a venue at which Stieg had been keen to lecture ever since the publication of his first book, *Extremhögern* (The Extreme Right), in the spring of 1991. Tributes came thick and fast, delivered by, among others, his father, Erland Larsson, his brother, Joakim Larsson, his partner, Eva Gabrielsson, the publisher of *Expo* magazine, Robert Aschberg, the publisher-in-chief of *Norstedts*, Svante Weyler, the historian Heléne Lööv, Graeme Atkinson from the British magazine *Searchlight* and Göran Eriksson, the head of the Swedish W.E.A. I was master of ceremonies.

After the memorial ceremony we repaired to Södra Teatern, the theatre in the Söder district of southern Stockholm, a favourite haunt of Stieg's in his last years, for a funeral feast. It was icy cold on the terrace; the December chill froze us through and through. We shared our grief – family, friends, acquaintances and the entire staff of *Expo*. It was late at night before we broke up. We trudged home, each of us with our own memories of Stieg etched indelibly on our minds.

That was when the really difficult part began. Mourning in private.

“Farewell” is a hard word to define. Who is saying farewell to whom? The one who leaves or the one who stays behind? I keep coming back to that question over and over again. Of course I have lost a lot of friends and acquaintances over the years, but Stieg was my first really close friend to die. I set myself very high standards while grieving, but found myself groping around helplessly even so. I didn’t know how to mourn with sufficient intensity.

After a while I realized that my memory was failing me. I forgot the names of people, lost my sense of direction, became anxious and depressed. But all the while the same message was pounding away at the back of my mind: I had to be strong. Stieg’s partner, Eva, and the young members of the *Expo* still needed me. I couldn’t let them down now. I must not burst into tears in front of friends and acquaintances. I had learned a lesson from my time in the mountains of Kurdistan during the freedom struggle there: there is a time to weep, and a time to maintain a stiff upper lip and do whatever needs to be done.

I realized that I had to compromise. For a long time I avoided *Expo* and the places where Stieg and I used to meet: Il Caffè, Café Anna, Café Latte, the Indian restaurants on Kungsholmen and McDonald’s in St Eriksgatan. Eventually I began to behave in exactly the opposite way. I wore black and made a point of going to the places I used to frequent with Stieg. It wasn’t that I imagined we were sitting there together. It was rather a case of going there in order to come to terms with my own situation, irrespective of whether I actually wanted a meal.

Months passed. Eventually the day came when the first reviews of *Män som hatar kvinnor* (Men Who Hate Women, in English called *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*) were published. I eagerly devoured every word and was overwhelmed by a strange feeling: I took everything that was said about the book personally. I began to regard myself as a sort of stand-in for Stieg. The reviews were almost exclusively positive, which pleased and distressed me at the same time. I was pleased by the thought that the books were going to be read by a lot of people, distressed because Stieg wouldn’t be able to experience this for himself.

Eventually the first anniversary of that awful day came round. Rain pelted remorselessly against the windowpanes during the night of 8 November. My flat was only a stone’s throw from Stieg’s house. I was overcome once more by a tidal wave of sorrow and longed to be able to talk to him. I wished I could tell him that I was in love with a woman I knew he had met at one of the parties we had attended together. But there was only silence. I sat there, staring at the black and white tie Stieg had worn the last day of his life, the one Eva had given me as a keepsake. He should be close by, I thought, but I felt so dreadfully far away.

Maybe that was the moment when it finally came home to me that he had left us for good. I would never see him again. That night I made up my mind to travel to Skelleftehamn, the town in northern Sweden where he had been born, and to Umeå, where he had grown up. I bought plane tickets and prepared for the journey, but when the departure day dawned I realized that there was no chance of my travelling. Perhaps I’d be able to cope later on, but not yet. In fact I turned down several assignments in places close to his home territory: I still wasn’t up to it.

Stieg’s success as a writer did more than continue; if anything, the second volume in the Millennium trilogy, *Flickan som lekte med elden* (*The Girl Who Played with Fire*), was even more of a triumph. People in the trade began to talk about the most successful Swedish books of all time – and the third volume, *Luftslottet som sprängdes* (*The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets’ Nest*), hadn’t even been published yet. Stieg’s name appeared in the newspapers almost every day; people on buses and in the underground had their heads buried in his books. He was still a constant presence in my life.

It struck me how little I actually knew about Stieg’s existence before we met. He hardly even mentioned the first twenty years of his life during all the time we were good friends. I began

wonder if something had happened in his youth that made it difficult for him to be in the spotlight. He always refused to think of himself as important in any respect. On the other hand, he thought a lot of other people were important.

Who was Stieg?

I wrote that question down on a piece of paper and stared at the words. It suddenly occurred to me that the reason he worked himself to death might be hidden away in his past. The fact is that even if we try to persuade ourselves otherwise, no human being is capable of working like Stieg did. Did he do it in an attempt to achieve ambitious goals he had set himself, or was it some kind of escapism? It may sound odd, but I really do believe that Stieg often thought he could change the world single-handedly if he only worked hard enough at it. I sometimes used to feel guilty because I myself was in favour of gradual change, while he could only feel at ease when he was working flat out. I have never met anybody with such a compulsive drive to work, such strength and energy.

\*

Once I had asked myself that question – who was Stieg? – I noticed how the journalist in me was slowly but surely aroused once more. I started researching his early life and scanning the local newspapers *Västerbottens Folkblad* and *Västerbottens Kuriren*. Every day I learned something new about him – his homes in Hagmarksvägen and Ersmarksgatan in the Sandbacka district of Umeå, his years at the Hagaskolan primary school, then the Dragonskolan grammar school. I searched for his name in driving-school records, even though I knew he didn't have a licence. Perhaps it was a decision he had made early on without realizing the implications: the first piece of advice the police give to an individual living under threat is not to own a car, because the easiest way to track someone down in Sweden is through the driver and vehicle licensing authority.

When I discovered that Stieg had worked as a dishwasher at Sävargården in Umeå, I telephoned the well-known restaurant; none of the current staff had been working there at the same time. I was astonished to learn that he had completed his two years of national service with the I20 infantry regiment in Umeå. It is almost impossible to imagine Stieg as an infantryman. More credible was his spell as a manager at the pulp mill in Hörnefors.

Slowly but surely I worked my way back in time; it was like fitting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Almost before I knew where I was, I found myself in Östra Valliden and Varuträsk, just outside Skellefteå. There I got to know about a boy whose father had died and so had found himself in a foster home. This was Stieg's maternal grandfather. His first job was as a farmhand; then, like so many of his contemporaries in the 1920s, he worked as a navvy, building roads, or as a lumberjack. In his free time he hunted game in the forests or fished in the lakes around Bjursele.

His name was Severin Boström. It became obvious to me that in order to know Stieg Larsson, you needed to become acquainted with his maternal grandfather. People in Ursviken said of Severin that he was "a very passionate man". He had moved to Ursviken, between Skellefteå and Skelleftehamn, in order to run an engineering workshop. He repaired chainsaws, mopeds and bicycles. As soon as he could afford it he bought a car. During the Second World War, like so many people in those northern parts, he became a devout anti-Nazi. In his case, his convictions were so strong that they were a key influence on his notion of right and wrong.

One summer's day in 1953, at a dance in the People's Park in Skellefteå, Severin's daughter Vivianne met a man by the name of Erland Larsson, who was on a fortnight's leave from his military service. They fell in love, and a year later, on 15 August, 1954, the young pair had a son: Karl Stig Erland Larsson.

It was far from easy for a young couple to make a living in those days. For a while Stieg



grandfather and father both worked at the Rönnskär sawmill, but before long Erland and Vivianne decided to seek their fortune in Stockholm, realizing that they would be forced to leave their one-year-old son with his maternal grandparents near Nordsjö.

It was 1962 before the family could be reunited. By then, Stieg had acquired a younger brother Joakim, born in 1957. They all moved into a new home in Umeå, where Vivianne worked in a clothing shop and Erland was employed as an interior decorator for the clothes chain Berlins, which had shops in central Umeå, Skellefteå, Piteå and Örnsköldsvik.

While I was tracing Stieg's past, I frequently felt a kind of kinship with him. I was also forced to move house frequently because of my father's political activities. I like to think that children who grow up in such conditions develop a blend of rootlessness and restlessness. Combine those qualities with curiosity and you have a mixture that can be extremely important for a journalist later in life; but when you are a child, you often feel very much alone in the world.

As a teenager I ended up in Tensta, in Greater Stockholm, in a new country and without any friends. Stieg had also moved there only a few years previously – for him it was the same country, of course, but coming from Västerbotten in the remote north no doubt caused him his fair share of culture shock.

When we first met, as adults, Stieg and I had one thing very much in common: we had very few close friends.

With hindsight I have often thought that the restlessness we shared was an important reason why we got on so well together. When you have few friends around you, you often develop interests that fit well with your situation. In Stieg's case, films and the night sky were of great importance. Erland had a job for a while as the caretaker of a cinema, so Stieg and his younger brother were often able to sneak in and watch films. Stieg loved to immerse himself in this make-believe world, entranced by the captivating happenings on the silver screen. The same thing applied to his star-gazing, the heavens a grand mystery of which an individual could never experience more than a tiny fraction.

When Stieg celebrated his twelfth birthday he was given a Facit typewriter and a telescope. They were by no means cheap presents, probably costing a lot more than his parents could afford. For Stieg it was the fulfilment of a dream. One of his diaries contains several entries like this one: "1/2.196 P.S. We spent a quarter of an hour searching for Uranus, without success."

It was around this time that Stieg became interested in politics, despite still being so young. His mother had become increasingly involved in trade union work and was soon a member of the local housing committee, active on the Disability Council and one of the founders of the first local authority equality committee. It was at this time that Stieg met Eva Gabrielsson, who was to become his partner. The occasion was a 1972 rally of the National Liberation Front protesting against the Vietnam War.

A friend of his told me that Stieg was also a keen photographer as a teenager – but the pictures were not the usual family snaps: he took photographs "in order to record injustice in the world".

Umeå soon became too small for Stieg. He had big ambitions. At the age of seventeen he hitchhiked lift on a long-distance lorry to Stockholm, and from there set off for Algeria. He had raised the necessary money by taking temporary jobs as a newspaper delivery boy and a dishwasher. But he didn't get very far: he was mugged, lost all his travel money and had to return to Umeå. Nevertheless, being the stubborn mule that he was, he worked hard to raise the funds for another attempt. This was the beginning of a series of long journeys. He finally reached Algeria and sold his leather jacket in order to be able to prolong his stay. After a two-year gap to do his military service in Sweden, he set off on his travels once more – this time to Africa.

He was twenty-one when he landed in Khartoum, continuing from there to Eritrea and Ethiopia. The innocent abroad who had lost all his money almost before he had even set off was by now a seasoned

globetrotter. In northern Ethiopia Stieg was interrogated by M.I.6, the British security service. In addition to being scared stiff and angry, he fell seriously ill after staying in a cheap hotel in Addis Ababa. For some considerable time he had no opportunity to contact anyone in Sweden, and it was not until he arrived in Kenya in a bus convoy that he could send a message confirming that he was Olof. From Kenya he continued on to Uganda, where he was able to catch a flight to Moscow, and from there back home to Sweden.

It wasn't the actual travelling that attracted him, though. More relevant was the fact that this way of gathering knowledge would help him to become what he now knew he wanted to be: a journalist. He had already made up his mind to enrol on a course in Stockholm. As if to mark the fact that this signalled a new phase in his life, he changed his first name.

That was when he became Stieg Larsson.

As with so much else in his life, his name change was something he preferred not to talk about, and he never told me exactly why he did it. Perhaps he was afraid that people would find it a bit odd. If there was anything he avoided like the plague, it was seeming to pretend to be somebody special.

Yet again I found myself asking myself the same old question: Who was Stieg?

I think the only answer that holds water is that he was a combination of the people who influenced his life, not least his grandfather Severin, his grandmother Tekla, his mother, Vivianne, his father Erland, and his partner, Eva. But there was also an element of escapism. He was always aware of the need to keep pushing at the boundaries. He moved from Umeå to Stockholm. Took his typewriter and telescope with him. But he needed to keep pressing on. New goals, new challenges. The letter added to his first name fitted the pattern, because it also *hid* something. Stieg always kept something hidden despite the fact that he invariably gave so much to everyone with whom he came into contact.

It suddenly occurs to me that it could well be this ability to hide things that made him unique as a writer of crime fiction. He had so many secrets – perhaps the most extreme example of that is the crime trilogy he wrote at night. Quite a lot of people knew that he was writing, and he also referred frequently to crime novels by other authors, claiming that he could write at least as well as they did. But that is not what I mean. The fact is that he wrote three thumping great novels before getting round to submitting them to a publisher. How common is that? Why did he do it? In so many ways, Stieg was and always will be an enigma. The bottom line is that part of his character was mysterious.

At the same time, few people are as generous in their relationships as Stieg was. He gave, and so many of us were keen to receive what he had to offer. I have no doubt at all how he would have responded to Raymond Carver's two momentous questions.

*Did you get what you wanted from this life?*

Yes.

*And what did you want?*

To be loved.

## The first conversation

The most stereotyped crime novels generally begin with a telephone call. A chief inspector is woken up in the middle of the night by persistent ringing. Eventually he gropes sleepily for the receiver, checks the clock and is informed that a murder has been committed. He has to stagger out into the freezing-cold winter's night and make his way to the scene of the crime. The drama can begin.

It was not in the middle of the night that the story of Stieg and me began, but it did start with a telephone call. I still remember exactly when it was: Tuesday, 4 February, 1992. When I reached for the telephone, which was ringing just as persistently as in a sleepy chief inspector's bedroom, the voice I heard skipped the usual polite preliminaries: "I hope I'm not disturbing you at an inconvenient moment. I have something important to discuss."

At the time I was a member of the 21 February Committee and was sitting in their newly established headquarters in the Kungsholmen district of Stockholm. The committee's name referred to a strike that had been called in reaction to the shooting of eleven people in Stockholm by an individual the media had labelled the Laser Man. Hardly a day passed without the newspapers printing long articles about this lunatic who had been wandering around in broad daylight, aiming his laser sights at dark-skinned immigrants. The capital was on tenterhooks for several months, especially since one of the victims, a Swedish-Iranian interpreter, had been shot dead on 8 November, 1991. Another ten immigrants had been seriously wounded, some of their injuries potentially fatal.

It would be no exaggeration to say that during these terrible months Stockholm felt like a city under siege. If not for all its citizens, then certainly for those with dark skins. It was a time many commentators called the most repugnant in recent Swedish history – a period full of menace and political betrayal.

I quickly realized that the caller had no intention of congratulating me on my role as a strike organizer. He continued without pausing: "You have said on the radio and television that if it were not for immigrants, Sweden would grind to a halt. You're absolutely right. But why is it only immigrants who are allowed to take part in the strike? What you have said excludes the majority of the population. How do you envisage including *my* solidarity with Swedish immigrants?"

"Er . . ." I began, but was immediately interrupted.

"I was born in Skellefteå of two Swedish parents, but I've lived for many years in the Stockholm suburb of Rinkeby, which has a high proportion of immigrant residents. I want to take part in the strike on 21 February, because racism isn't just an immigrant problem, it's a problem for Sweden as a whole."

Obviously, I understood what he was leading up to, but he didn't allow me to get a word in edgewise before making his own proposal.

"I want you to call a press conference and say that everybody in Sweden, irrespective of the color of their skin, their gender, their mother tongue, their nationality, their homeland, their sexual orientation or their religion, is welcome to take part in this strike to demonstrate solidarity with immigrant Swedes at 10.00 this coming Friday."

Only then did he explain who he was. I recognized his name, having been present once or twice when he had delivered an address, usually at some demonstration or other, or at a rally to express solidarity with refugees. Most importantly, I knew he was the author of the pioneering book *Extremhögern*, an analysis of anti-democratic movements that had been published the previous year. It was a book I had been unable to put down.

Nevertheless I would be lying if I were to claim that I believed for one second that this telephone call was the beginning of a lifelong friendship.

Before we hung up – I had hardly said a word – he invited me to come and listen to his lecture “The Far Right in Sweden and Europe”, to be delivered that same evening at the Swedish W.E.A. in Stockholm. I spent some considerable time wondering if there were any reasons why I shouldn’t go.

I realized immediately that Stieg had put his finger on something important. Of course it was wrong to exclude anybody from a demonstration intended as an expression of frustration at feeling excluded. But it wasn’t so easy to change such a significant decision – not when you had been voted into the office you held by 128 ethnic, anti-racist and religious associations and intercultural organizations across Sweden. There were many different opinions to take into consideration. In such circumstances key decisions must be taken by a committee, which in this case comprised thirteen members with views that were often very different.

And time was short. All the leaflets and suchlike had already been ordered from the printer’s and posters had even been sent to all the towns where rallies were to be held. Then had come that urgent telephone call to put the cat among the pigeons. I had no doubt that this Stieg Larsson was absolutely right, however. In a strange way I seemed to have known that all along: the telephone call was simply the catalyst that spurred me to do something about it.

I did what struck me as being the right thing to do: called my contact at Swedish Radio and announced that everybody in Sweden, irrespective of skin colour, gender, mother tongue, nationality, homeland, sexual orientation or religion, was welcome to take part in the demonstration, with the rallying call “Sweden will grind to a halt without immigrants.”

Nine months passed between that telephone call and my first real meeting with Stieg. Not surprisingly, it took place over lunch. We arranged to meet at the modest Vasa restaurant in Odenplan, a mere stone’s throw away from my office in Rehnsgatan.

This was before mobile phones had come into their own, enabling people to ring to say they had been delayed. I sat there wondering where he had got to. I did all the usual things – read a newspaper, thought about what else I had to do that day, made an occasional note in my diary. Then I looked at the clock for what must have been the hundredth time. Still no sign of Stieg. I’m usually pretty tolerant when it comes to people turning up late, but now I was starting to get annoyed. It was nearly an hour after the time we had agreed to meet and I found myself formulating a rather stiff dressing-down. I had better things to do than hang about in a third-rate restaurant all day. Besides, I was hungry. Now it was 2.00; if it hadn’t been for my Kurdish upbringing I would no doubt have ordered food long since. To make matters worse, waiters were hovering around my table, as if they expected me to continue sitting there on my own, then leave without ordering anything. An hour and a quarter late, I thought of myself, smacking the table with my rolled-up newspaper. That’s it. Enough is enough.

Just as I was getting up to leave, I noticed out of the corner of my eye a smiling, self-assured seeming man wearing round glasses, a grey corduroy jacket, a checked shirt and a yellow polka-dot tie. He approached me at a leisurely pace, running his hand through his light brown hair. The first thing that struck me was that anybody observing this man would never have dreamt that he was over an hour late for an appointment.

“I’m sorry,” he said as he sat down. “I’ve been held up by the usual threats. The police tell me

have to be careful. My way of dealing with this is never to turn up on time. Are you hungry? I don't want a cup of coffee."

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We shook hands; he lit a cigarette and leaned back in his chair.

"No problem," I said with a shrug. "Ever since I was a kid things have always gone wrong for me on Wednesdays. Why should today be any different?"

I was not happy with either my attempt to smooth things over or Stieg's evasive apology, but I did my best to conceal my irritation. I ordered cod and boiled potatoes, not expecting the food to put me in a better mood.

To begin with, we talked about *Svartvitt* (Black and White), the anti-racist magazine of which I was editor-in-chief. It had been launched as a not-for-profit venture on 20 October, 1987, the remit being to focus on matters of tolerance that other publications seemed to shy away from. Many critics regarded it as provocative. Stieg praised it to the skies. I liked the calm way in which he talked; his tone was warm and convincing, even if there was also something intriguing about it. At first I thought it was another of his precautionary measures, trying to seem a bit mysterious and elusive, at least when meeting face to face.

We moved on to the topics of the moment – the Laser Man, the way in which the populist protest party New Democracy had wormed its way into the parliament after the 1991 general election, the increasingly anti-immigrant image of the Sweden Democrats, and the incredibly naive reaction of the established parties to the threats to democracy these developments posed.

We must have talked for at least two hours. Ashtrays were changed regularly and rapidly filled by Stieg's cigarette butts. Despite the fact that we had only just met, it felt as if we had known each other for ages. I thought he was one of the most courageous people I had ever encountered. There was no mistaking his commitment – I had rarely come across anybody more passionately convinced of the democratic ideal and the equality of all human beings.

But at the same time there was something modest about him. I immediately detected a paradox in Stieg Larsson's make-up, and my suspicions would be confirmed as the years passed. He would go out of his way to find people with whom he could work, but all the while he wanted to dictate the way in which the cooperation functioned. He disliked being in the limelight and doing all the talking, especially on television. This led to friction at times, and when I look back over the years we worked together, this contradiction was nearly always the root cause of our disagreements.

Having said that, the paradox was convincingly trumped by the vehemence he displayed in his fight against racism and neo-Nazism. It is simply impossible to describe how passionate, how fervent, not to say how obsessed he was by this mission. I once described him as a mixture of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, the Dalai Lama and Pippi Longstocking. I concede that this was perhaps a little crude, but it was a sincere attempt to pin down a man with unique and contradictory character traits of a type one rarely encounters.

Another thing that struck me that first time we sat talking – me waiting for my lunch, Stieg with his cups of coffee and his cigarettes – was how animatedly he gesticulated. He also impressed me with the breadth and depth of his knowledge. Naturally, we were well aware that the precarious position in which Sweden found itself in 1992 was nothing compared with the intolerant, anti-immigrant forces at work in Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, Norway, Belgium and Italy. We were indisputably living in Europe beginning to show its claws in a way that made us worry that a catastrophe might be imminent.

You could say that Sweden was emerging from a Sleeping Beauty-like torpor. For years Swedes had been convinced that they were immune from racism – not the unease with regard to everything new and foreign that is sometimes discussed around dinner tables here and there, but the *organizational* antipathy that arranges demonstrations at election meetings and tries to influence decisions made at local, regional and central government level. During our lunch Stieg compared these forces to a virulent

spreading through Sweden. He maintained that the battle against them needed fighting every day. ~~one ignored the situation for long enough, it could become an uncontrolled epidemic.~~

I have often been accused of being a bad listener. People tell me I talk too much. No doubt they are right. But on that occasion I hardly said a word; I sat there entranced by Stieg's powerful imageries, neat turns of phrase and black humour. Believe it or not, I let him say all he had to say without interruption. Perhaps I was already fascinated by the contradictory nature of what he was saying. In addition to the mixture of team player and solo performer already mentioned, there was also a remarkable combination of stress and inner calm. He spoke both forcefully and calmly about important principles: about how people should never be insulted, about the struggle for women's rights, about the importance of humane refugee policies. Matters that most people would agree on, even if many would nod in approval but not do very much about ensuring that things changed for the better. Here was a man who would never give up until the goals had been achieved.

Stieg's duality was a feature of our friendship from the very start. But there was no question at all about where his heart was. During all the years of our friendship I never doubted for one single second that Stieg Larsson was on the side of the weak and vulnerable. He was always prepared to speak up for anybody and everybody incapable of making a case for themselves. And that was not all: he was willing to pay a high price in order to bring about change.

I had realized this long before the sad-looking cod and overcooked potatoes landed on the table with a thud.

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How can you get to know somebody who hardly ever talks about his private life? That's something I've often thought about. Whenever Stieg entered a room, he automatically became the centre of attention. Despite that, it was impossible to regard him as anything other than unpretentious.

Some people would no doubt maintain that the fact he spoke so little about himself and was always keen to avoid the limelight was due to his northern Swedish origins. He often reminded people that he was, for better or worse, from the far north. He actually said as much the very first time we spoke during that brief telephone call. He referred to his northern origins and the fact that he had been involved in politics while still clinging to his mother's apron strings – those two basic facts about Stieg are impossible to ignore.

You may be born a northerner, but being involved in politics is something else entirely. Stieg's burning interest in politics was aroused as early as 1968, when he was fourteen years old. He was lucky in that his mother, Vivianne, was devoid of prejudice and loved to indulge in long political discussions. He spent hours talking to her about starvation in Biafra, Soviet aggression or the Vietnam War – much of his passion for justice can doubtless be traced back to conversations with his mother in their kitchen. Contemporaries also attest that Stieg's mother was a gifted storyteller; perhaps I learned a few tricks from her, who knows?

The 1970s were a politically charged decade, and Stieg was hardly the only fourteen-year-old to protest against the Vietnam War by joining the National Liberation Front. Even at secondary school he contributed polemical articles to newspapers and magazines.

Nevertheless, his political involvement cannot be explained exclusively by the trends of the time or some kind of teenage revolt. It was a built-in part of his character, just like his northern origins.

There are few aspects of my life that cannot be traced back to the fact that I am a Kurd. The inevitability of my being an outsider is obviously associated with my origins. I am closely linked with a people that is either disowned or opposed. This fact is an important part of my make-up and memories, and it has inevitably formed what interests and drives me.

But the feeling of being an outsider can manifest itself in many different ways. There is no doubt that Stieg also felt that he was excluded. In his case it was due largely to his working-class background, but also to his political sympathies. I think this is why he never went to university and instead built his career on his trade union activities. A characteristic of trade unionists is that they often work full-time during the day in order to earn a living, devoting themselves to the things that really interest them – together with others similarly minded – in their spare time. Perhaps this doesn't apply to everybody, but it certainly applied to Stieg. He went out of his way to ensure that he always had a secure job, and after an eight-hour working day he would turn his full attention to anti-racist activities.

The project he was most proud of was his contribution as Nordic correspondent to the British magazine *Searchlight*. He often told me about his assignments in Grenada and Eritrea. In a way, perhaps, it was revenge for being rejected by the Stockholm College of Journalism on the grounds that his school leaving grades were not good enough. We had been friends for a long time before I heard about that. I tried to imagine how Stieg must have felt. He was passionate about writing on important matters and knew he could do it as well as anybody; but he failed to gain a place on a course which would have made things easier for him in many ways – work experience posts on a variety of newspapers, opportunities to build up a network of contacts while being trained.

What did it feel like for a working-class boy from the remote north of Sweden to find the door slammed in his face? I think it was a setback that scarred Stieg for life. He once told me in confidence that if there was one person he admired, it was his grandfather Severin Boström, for his determined opposition to Hitler during the Second World War – activities that continued long after the peace treaty was signed in 1945. Perhaps it was his grandfather who was the inspiration for Stieg's education in the university of life, far from Stockholm and academia, and who convinced him that a man can achieve a lot if he is passionate about a cause.

## *Expo* – blowing the whistle on extremism

Baobab trees thrive best on the savannah, where they tower majestically over the flat grassland. Their branches are magnificent, but look a bit awkward compared with the enormous trunks. A baobab tree needs well-drained soil and is unique in that it can suck up such a large amount of water that it survives even long periods of drought. But it is extremely sensitive to rot and dislikes the cold. It is also known as the monkey-bread tree, after its pear-like fruits. Presumably monkeys are especially fond of them.

If you glance quickly at a baobab tree, it almost looks as if it is growing upside down. A substantial trunk some twenty metres tall, with a small crown at the top. It is hardly surprising that there are many folktales and legends about the baobab. Most of them claim that a god became so angry with the tree that he pulled it up, roots and all, then replanted it with the branches downwards.

I sometimes suggest that idealistic, not-for-profit magazines are like the baobab tree. The difference is that magazines suck up money rather than water. But what decides whether a magazine will survive or not is how long it can keep going during long periods of drought.

Without a doubt, the most important project in Stieg's life was the magazine *Expo*, which he and others founded as a result of his belief that it was essential to create a Swedish version of *Searchlight*. His view was hardly surprising: the situation in Sweden was deteriorating in a worrying way. In the 1994 elections, the Sweden Democrats polled almost fourteen thousand votes, which gave them five seats on local councils. In 1988 they had received 1,118 votes and in 1991 4,887. In other words, they were expanding quickly – disturbingly quickly. In 1991 they had won two local council seats without causing much of a reaction.

The established parliamentary parties were not at all sure how to deal with the situation and tended to wash their hands of it, treating it as an aberration. But it turned out to be an aberration that developed into something much bigger. In the 2006 elections the Sweden Democrats got 162,400 votes and won 281 local council seats. This boil on the skin of Swedish democracy was the main reason why *Expo* came into existence.

During the years it took to build *Expo* up from nothing, Stieg had to endure his fair share of successes and droughts. I was able to observe his indefatigability over and over again. Sometimes I am convinced that *Expo* cut Stieg's life short, because of all the threats it received and the financial crises it suffered. Other times I have the feeling that it was thanks to *Expo* that Stieg was able to find the space his creativity needed – it was almost as if it provided the air he required in order to breathe.

Stieg's relationship with *Expo* – it really is possible to see it as a relationship between two people – was filled with happiness, creativity, setbacks and complications. Not least with love. The staff were a collection of young and hungry journalists keen to face up to big challenges. Stieg stood out for many reasons, one being his experience – in the mid-1980s he was among those who launched the anti-violence project Stop Racism. Moreover, he was the only one at the magazine over thirty.

Starting something from nothing has advantages and disadvantages. It can be time-consuming to procure the resources necessary to make a project happen, but it is also stimulating to realize exact



what you have envisaged. Along with the others, Stieg threw himself wholeheartedly into *Expo*. There were big problems to solve and minor matters to sort out – the bottom line was that everything needed to be resolved in the shortest possible time.

The first matter to be tackled was ownership. The first owner was the Hill Foundation, which eventually became the *Expo* Research Foundation. Next, *Expo*'s remit was spelled out:

. . . to study and survey anti-democratic, right-wing extremist and racist tendencies in Swedish society. All activities are idealistic and non-profit-making. The foundation's policy is to safeguard democracy and freedom of expression against racist, right-wing extremist, anti-Semitic and totalitarian tendencies in society. *Expo* has no links to specific parties or political groups, but cooperates with all individuals and groups that share the foundation's philosophy.

A lot of effort went into raising the necessary capital, not least in order to begin the intensive work on creating an international archive comprising thousands of books, posters, magazines, newspaper articles, videos, records and photographs linked in one way or another to racism, neo-Nazism and far right extremism. The archive soon became unique and irreplaceable. There was only one problem: the costs had got out of hand.

*Expo* moved first into basement premises in Lundagatan in the Södra district of Stockholm (Lisbeth Salander's first flat was located in the very same street); by the end of 1995 they had moved to a cheaper basement at Färggårdstorget 32, in the Skanstull district. That same year saw the publication of the first issue. One of the pictures in it showed a person giving the Nazi salute, but hiding his face behind a partially open door.

The editorial board could not possibly have imagined the success they went on to achieve with the first thirty-two pages. Stieg wrote the leading article about the horrific bomb outrage in Oklahoma City in April 1995, which cost 168 lives. The board was delighted to note that the matters they took up in that first issue were being discussed in lively debates in schools and workplaces, by trade unions and political parties.

The journal immediately attracted large numbers of subscribers, several of whom paid more than the nominal fee in order to demonstrate their support. But there were also critical voices. Some commentators felt that *Expo* had acted in an unethical way and gone too far in its efforts to track down racist networks. Every journal with high ideals can expect criticism; much worse were the constant threats. Needless to say, a magazine that devotes so much effort to identifying racist and neo-Nazi activities will create enemies. The last thing people involved in such activities want is to find themselves in the spotlight. And they think nothing of resorting to violent tactics.

From the very start *Expo*'s staff were labelled as "traitors" in neo-Nazi publications, and countless defamatory letters were sent to newspaper editors and to parliamentary parties and their youth sections. The first organized hate campaign took place in May of 1996 – fifteen months after *Expo*'s launch – when the magazine's printer's premises were sabotaged. Every window was smashed and totally demolished using glass-cutters, in order to demonstrate how easily the building could be entered if the firm continued to print *Expo*. Retailers offering *Expo* for sale suffered similar attacks and walls were sprayed with the message "Don't Print *Expo*!"

Of course, attacks of this kind often have a positive side: they set people talking. The subsequent debate means that editors and commentators are forced to take sides, and that in turn leads to discussion points rising to the surface. Very few people want to live in a society where you put your life in danger by printing a magazine.

In any case, it was obvious that a lot of people were actually jealous of all the attention *Expo* had

been lucky enough to attract in such a short time. Some commentators stood the situation on its head and wondered how much support a right-wing-extremist equivalent of *Expo* would receive if it suffered a similar attack. *Expo*'s new editor-in-chief, Andreas Rosenlund, made several brilliant contributions to the debate that followed. He summarized the situation by pointing out that "instead of trying to conduct a democratic exchange of views, these people turn to gangster tactics".

Despite all the support the journal received during these difficult weeks, nobody was able to convince the printers that it was a price worth paying for freedom of speech. They had been so scared that they felt obliged to cancel their contract with *Expo*.

It was not necessary to call in a world-class sleuth in order to work out who was behind the campaign of violence directed at retailers selling *Expo*. The neo-Nazi newspaper *Info-14* – which, remarkably enough, produced its first edition the same year, 1995 – reported promptly and in detail how the attacks had been carried out, going so far as to propose new targets. As well as being a newspaper, *Info-14* was a political outlet for the National Alliance. Its founder, Robert Vesterlund, was also chairman of Sweden Democratic Youth. The police interrogated large numbers of people associated with the newspaper, but never managed to bring anybody to trial.

As so often happens, the racist attacks had the opposite effect to what had been intended. On 1 June, 1996, the editorial boards of Sweden's two biggest evening newspapers, *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen*, decided to demonstrate their solidarity with *Expo* by publishing and distributing without charge an edition of the journal together with one of their own issues, with a print run of over eight hundred thousand.

*Expo*'s list of subscribers increased significantly, and the smile on Stieg's lips became broader than ever. He even plucked up enough courage to joke about the thugs threatening him, calling them his "prey". They consisted of a motley collection of latent neo-Nazis in Strängnäs, active neo-Nazis and members of the National Socialist Front in Skåne, and lunatics in the Keep Sweden Swedish organization in Uppsala, Västerås and Helsingborg. Several of them were subscribers, even though their motivation had nothing to do with boosting *Expo*'s finances. They would open each new issue in a state of expectancy: would fingers be pointed at them in one of the articles? Some of them considered it a significant milestone in their careers as racists, being mentioned by name in *Expo*. No doubt many of them were excused from paying for a round or two of beer in pubs in Skåne and Östgötaland as a result.

Sad to say, however, the attacks on printing works and retail outlets were only the beginning. It was not long before worse atrocities took place, often in Stieg's and my backyard. I am sometimes shattered by memories of what happened in those days.

A cursory glance at press cuttings from the time reveals a remarkable phenomenon. Quite a lot of people in Sweden are murdered by neo-Nazis shortly after parliamentary elections. According to statistics, the year after an election can be critical for people who don't "look Swedish" and who have names that are difficult to pronounce, Swedish anti-racists, anybody who has adopted a non-Scandinavian child, local politicians and journalists who expose racist tendencies.

Of all the horrific racist outrages, one stands out. It took place on 16 August, 1995, at Lake Ingetor in Kode, near Gothenburg. A fourteen-year-old boy, John Hron, had gone there camping with a friend. They had been looking forward to this outing, but the situation changed drastically when four young neo-Nazis turned up. The two boys were subjected to psychological and physical torture for three hours. John escaped by swimming out into the lake, but was forced to return when the neo-Nazi threatened to kill his friend. He swam back, at which point they turned their full attention on him. Having allowed his friend to escape, they subjected John to sophisticated torture: they would beat and kick him for a while, then change tactics and speak nicely to him, offering him a beer. In the end, having rendered him unconscious, they threw him into the water and watched him drown.

How can one explain such unprovoked violence? Is it possible to understand such bestial treatment simply because somebody has a foreign-sounding name?

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The next victim of racist violence was Patrick Nadji, an asylumseeker from the Ivory Coast. Two young neo-Nazis stabbed Patrick to death in Klippan, in Skåne. Why? "Because," according to the murderers, "he was a nigger." Moreover, the young man wielding the knife considered himself to be innocent: "I didn't do nothing. The nigger just jumped on to my knife."

It is one thing to associate neo-Nazi crimes with disaffected young people – it is no doubt possible to find all sorts of extenuating circumstances. But nobody should imagine that these were simple cases of isolated individuals acting out their fantasies about national superiority, ethnic cleansing and their other twisted ideologies. *Expo* was not content with exposing them as individuals. More important was the fact that there was increasing support for xenophobic tendencies in Swedish society. That was the root cause of the increase in hate crimes.

Despite *Expo's* many sympathizers, problems soon started piling up. As the threats increased advertising decreased. The number of subscribers sank steadily towards a thousand – the goal originally had been five thousand, but even when the journal was enjoying its greatest success, in the spring of 1996, the number was no more than two thousand.

In addition, one of the journal's staff stole 50,000 kronor from the sparse kitty because, as he put it, he needed money "to pick up women at Café Opera". To crown it all, a serious credibility problem arose when it was disclosed that one of *Expo's* researchers had been reported to the police for criminal damage.

But the most serious threat to *Expo's* existence was that there were too many colleagues pulling in different directions. Everybody worked almost 24/7. They woke up to *Expo* and dreamt of *Expo*. There was no time to stop and think; all that mattered was hard work, generally unpaid. There came a point when Stieg demanded even more sacrifices, but his colleagues felt they had given up enough of their time and their private lives. His solution was to work even harder. Everybody was aware of his inexhaustible capacity for work. The problem was that he demanded just as much of his colleagues as he did from himself.

Despite the enormous amount of work put into it, the journal found itself teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. In the end it was obvious to everybody that even Stieg was under extreme pressure. He seemed more and more worried, and his smile became increasingly strained. The prophets of doom were only too ready to put the boot in. They said Stieg was not cut out to be a manager, that he was a catastrophe as an administrator and financial officer. In many ways they were right. Stieg was fantastic with language, but only human (to say the least) when it came to figures and statistics. He was driven by the conviction that Sweden required a journal to keep an eye on anti-democratic developments. In order to produce one, he needed a closely knit team to work tirelessly on an idealistic basis for little financial reward.

That was when everything unravelled. Several contributors resigned from the editorial board, which in turn meant that those who stayed on had to work even harder. Stieg never really forgave the ones who left, even though he must have realized that, less than three years after its launch, *Expo* was about to sink.

During 1996 and 1997 the editorial board could have been compared to a football team. It comprised Stieg, Andreas, Jenny, Emmy, Tobias, Katarina, Peter, David, Micael, Mikael and a graphic designer. Stieg began as goalkeeper, in order to have the best possible overall view. But as colleagues resigned he also became team captain. That wasn't enough. So he decided to become the team trainer as well. That wasn't enough either, because he was forced to accept the fact that the number of players at his disposal was becoming fewer and fewer. Having urged them to take the field for one

final effort, he asked the referee for extra time.

Stieg refused to let *Expo* die. The idea that it was over and done for was not something that he could possibly contemplate. This despite the fact that it was clear to any objective observer that the journal was beyond help. Little did I think that I would play a leading role in the reincarnation of *Expo* lurking round the corner.

I knew that Stieg was under extreme pressure. It was obvious that *Expo*'s misfortunes were taking their toll. We had been meeting regularly for some years and regarded each other as close friends. He called me his kid brother and I called him my big brother. At first it was mainly for fun, but as time passed the names became a true reflection of our mutual trust.

One day in May 1998, we were in one of Stieg's favourite cafés, Il Caffè in Kungsholmen, and I had barely taken my first sip of coffee before it became clear that he had something important on his mind.

"Do you realize that I have very few real friends?"

Shaking my head, I said, "Perhaps you work too hard. Friends demand time, we both know that."

He agreed, and looked sad, almost dejected, which was very unlike him.

"*Expo* is in ruins," he said, looking down at his feet.

"So I've gathered."

"We haven't been able to do any proper journalism for ages. But we do have a trump card – our archive on neo-Nazism and racism in Europe."

Then something remarkable happened. It was as if at that very moment Stieg began to relinquish everything the journal had achieved, as if the solution to all its problems had suddenly dawned on him. Presumably he had already decided what he was going to do, but he gave the impression that it was happening even as he spoke, as if his words were leading him on. It was almost as if this was the moment when he regained his faith in *Expo*. As if an idea had just struck like a flash of lightning and taken possession of him.

"It's time to take some decisions," he said, leaning back in the little chair at the rear of the café. "I've been looking for a collaborator who will allow *Expo* to go its own way. I want to work with a journal without links to any particular political party. I'm tired of people accusing us of being a journal linked to the left."

Then he leaned forward and looked me in the eye.

"I'll come clean. We have about sixty kronor in the kitty. Do you think you could come to *Expo* rescue?"

I sat there in astonishment.

"How do you think that would be possible?"

"I thought you'd ask that," he said, stubbing out his cigarette. The smile I was so familiar with returned to his face, those sparkling eyes and the gesticulating hands. "I want *Expo* and *Svartvitt* to join forces. *Expo* will be a financial burden, but you'll earn a lot of goodwill. Besides, I'm convinced that you will be rewarded some time in the future."

I couldn't help laughing at such an optimistic prophesy, but Stieg merely brushed my laughter aside and continued.

"Now to the nitty-gritty. I want you to fund the printing and distribution of *Expo*. I'll take care of the editorial side. *Svartvitt*'s editorial staff are experienced in administering and funding a magazine. My colleagues and I are good at research and journalism, but we don't seem to be much good at anything else."

I leaned back in my chair and wondered what on earth to say. I had thought we were going to have a cup of coffee and chat like we usually did. Now I found myself faced with a proposal to merge our

journals.

I said nothing for quite a while. I agreed totally with Stieg that our publications had a lot in common. Unfortunately the financial state of both operations was also more similar than he seemed to realize. The National Council for Cultural Affairs had just cut *Svartvitt's* grant to 30,000 kronor. I had been so angry that I had called it "pin money", or so some cultural journalists had claimed. In order to make a point I had rejected the grant altogether. To make matters worse, we had just moved into larger premises in Pilgatan. You could hardly say that *Svartvitt* was in a fit state to take on new costs.

"I agree with you," I said in the end. "*Expo* is too important to be allowed to collapse. I'm prepared to do my bit. But how will it be done, in practical terms? Shall we have two publishers and two editors-in-chief?"

"I thought *Expo's* pages should be yellow instead of white. We'll design and produce between twelve and twenty-four pages. You'll pay for the printing and distribution. You can be editor-in-chief of both *Svartvitt* and *Expo*. Somebody from *Expo* can be the publisher. That way you can escape being taken to court all the time."

We both laughed at that. Stieg continued talking. He seemed to be in an exalted state now, gesticulating more and more wildly, with increasing confidence. I had swallowed the bait, and he knew it.

"Behind closed doors I will be the editor, but I don't want my name linked publicly with the job."

"As usual, in other words," I said.

"*Expo* and *Svartvitt* will be two independent and equal journals. None of us will have the right to interfere in the editorial work of the other. Is that sufficiently clear?"

"How long have you been thinking about this?"

He smiled and shrugged.

"Maybe I just thought it up."

"That wouldn't surprise me," I said. "But I have a few questions, Stieg. How come *Expo* writes so much about equality, but behaves like a men's club? How can an anti-racist journal find it so difficult to recruit staff with an immigrant background?"

"I agree. We lack credibility in that respect. We must do something about it immediately."

"O.K.," I said. "Those are my only objections. We can publish our journals jointly – let's say until the next election. Then we'll have to take stock and decide if we should continue. But before we shake hands on it, I want to propose a better deal than the one you offered me. We'll pay for printing and distribution. Can you pay the rent? If we make a profit, which I don't suppose we shall, we'll share the profits. If we run at a loss, I'll be responsible for the entire amount."

When we shook hands Stieg smiled more broadly than I had ever seen him do before. Although in fact he seemed more relieved than happy. It was as if a burden had been lifted from his shoulder. Perhaps he wasn't convinced that he had saved *Expo*, but he was pretty sure that he had bought enough time to ride out the storm.

"On Monday," I said, raising my coffee cup as if in a toast, "I'll arrange for a contract to be drawn up that both parties can sign. We can't have any misunderstandings just because you and I are such good friends."

He looked hard at me, then rolled another cigarette and lifted a yellow lighter with his left hand.

"No, Kurdo," he said rather sternly. "We don't need a contract. If I didn't trust you I would never have contacted you in the first place. I know you won't let me down. An oral promise and a handshake will be sufficient. From January onwards we'll publish *Svartvitt* together with *Expo*. We'll take care of the rent."

"O.K."

"What do you say to announcing the merger of Sweden's two most important anti-racist journals?"

30 November?"

~~"That sounds like an excellent idea," I said, realizing that this was something he'd been thinking about in order to attract maximum publicity. It was also practical to supply our combined subscribers with the news about *Svartvitt* and *Expo* on the day when nationalists celebrate the exploits of the Swedish warrior-king Charles XII. (Why they should want to do that is a bit of a mystery, as his defeat in the Great Northern War effectively brought the Swedish Empire to an end.)~~

We said goodbye outside Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå, headquarters of the Swedish Central News Agency, in Scheelegatan. I watched Stieg vanish through the door and found myself thinking about the remarkable baobab tree. For eleven years I had been carefully tending my own little tree known as *Svartvitt*. It was clear that I was now faced with a major challenge.

I eventually decided that two trees with similar characteristics would be bound to thrive together. They could support and shade each other in difficult times, which ought to make it easier for both to survive in the barren savannah. I felt happy and contented as I slowly made my way back to my office.

## Stieg as colleague and journalist

I've suddenly remembered something that happened in the early hours of 9 November, 1999. I was staying at the Prize Hotel in Stockholm. The telephone rang at 2.15. Although I was still awake, alarm bells went off inside my head – one seldom receives good news in the middle of the night.

“Stieg hasn't come home,” Eva screamed into my mobile.

She was sniffing and sobbing. I tried to calm her down, but I could feel myself going ice cold. In soothing a voice as I could manage, I assured her that nothing bad could have happened. A few hours later it became apparent that Stieg had fallen asleep in his office. Probably, now that I think about it, he had been working and had decided, unusually, to lie down on a sofa.

Today, so many years later, I can laugh at the memory.

Was that the moment I realized that Stieg was writing books at night? I can't remember. But I do remember clearly how relieved I was that nothing awful had happened to him.

When Stieg was appointed to a post as a graphic designer at Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå, he could hardly have realized how long he would be associated with that place of work. Although he maintained throughout those years that T.T. played an important role in independent news-reporting, he had a remarkable love–hate relationship with it. No doubt his appointment was in many ways a sort of revenge as far as he was concerned. Now he could make up for the frustration he had felt on being rejected as an eighteen-year-old by the Stockholm College of Journalism in the autumn of 1972. Now he would show them that their idiotic admissions requirements meant they had lost a reporter who was more than a match for anybody.

It was this lust for revenge which ensured that he had a plan even when he walked for the first time through the door of the Hötorget skyscraper where T.T. was based in the 1970s. He would work everything he was required to do in the way of illustrations, diagrams, pictures and paste-ups in order to become a fully fledged, damned good reporter in due course.

Things did not go according to plan, however. He was never given the assignments he expected, and the management appeared to have no interest at all in his ideas.

Despite this, T.T. came to mean an awful lot to Stieg. It was not simply a matter of earning a living; it was more a question of living or not living. The reasons why he could never bring himself to leave T.T. were mental, not financial.

I have worked through T.T.'s digital archives in an attempt to track down Stieg's articles. The first time his name crops up is in January 1982. On 11 July, 1985, his initials – “sla” – appear in print for the first time. In connection with an illustration. Then follow hundreds of illustrations, diagrams, pictures and paste-ups, all signed by him. Strikingly often they are linked with financial articles.

The first article he wrote dates from 22 January, 1992, and is about the history of the Swedish intelligence agency. If you consider all the years Stieg worked at T.T., he wrote comparatively few articles of any length. I have traced twenty-five written between 1992 and 1999. Eight are tips for crime novels to read at Christmas or during the summer holidays, which is interesting in view of what

happened later. The articles show clearly that Stieg was impressed by the novels of Sara Paretsky, Harlan Ellison, Liza Cody and, last but by no means least, Elizabeth George.

Nevertheless, most of the articles are in his field of expertise: neo-Nazism and racism in Sweden and abroad. Three of them are about the bomb outrage in Oklahoma. Of course, there may be many more unsigned articles by Stieg, and one cannot exclude the possibility that several signed articles were overlooked during the scanning process (those who worked on it have admitted that T.T.'s repository of news articles is far from complete).

So, although he was fighting against the odds, Stieg hung on at T.T. He was pretty frank about his conviction that obstacles were constantly being placed in his way, not least because his superiors seldom allowed him to write about matters on which he was an expert. Nevertheless he never felt for one second that he was being victimized. Instead, he mounted counterattacks whenever opportunities presented themselves. He even went so far as to organize his own "resistance group" at T.T. This included several members of staff who got on well together and had more or less the same views on journalism. This group supported him when his superiors complained or prevaricated.

Now, many years later, I find it hard to understand why he behaved as he did. Why this constant battle? Couldn't he have done what everybody else would have done and simply looked for another job? Sometimes I suspect he liked to create his own battlefield where he could leap up on to his horse and wield his sword and bayonet. The image of Don Quixote occasionally crops up in my mind's eye.

Similarly, T.T. seems like a big windmill spinning round at a leisurely pace. Or perhaps a fan belt whizzing round out of sight inside an engine which ought to be changed after a certain number of kilometres but is still there. You almost get the feeling that the whole engine will grind to a halt when the belt eventually snaps. It often seemed as if those in charge at T.T. had no idea how to handle the bolshie employee from the far north who was at one moment an implacable warhorse and at the next moment more like a miserable schoolboy sulking in a corner of the playground. They never knew if he was going to do his own thing – and ignore their rules – or toe the line.

There is no point in suppressing the fact that on occasion Stieg stretched the rules to breaking point. For instance, as a T.T. reporter he wrote news items about having himself received death threats. Nobody at T.T. seems to have noticed. Or possibly they didn't have the strength to argue with him and so turned a blind eye. A quick glance at T.T.'s archives shows that in his capacity as a member of the *Expo* editorial board, he "interviewed" himself five times in the period 1992–9.

It was precisely this lack of impartiality and relevance that made his position at T.T. so complicated. Such goings-on are far removed from what a news agency ought to be doing. But Stieg simply couldn't help himself. The moment he sat down at a computer, he took sides for or against.

These facts make it easy to understand how *Expo* could have become such an important part of Stieg's life. The number of articles he wrote for T.T. declined in inverse proportion to his increasing involvement with *Expo*. Perhaps, paradoxically, this was what forced him to stay on at T.T. He needed his salaried post because *Expo*'s financial situation was always so awful.

Early on in our friendship I realized what the force was that drove Stieg: justice – irrespective of class, gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation. I couldn't possibly count how many times he said "Everybody is worth the same as everybody else." Over and over again. Most of us would agree, no doubt; but I have never heard that sentiment expressed with such emphasis and conviction. The concept of justice was an integral part of his being, I don't know how else to describe it.

Like many others of his generation, Stieg had grown up with a political vision, in his case Trotskyism. But unlike quite a few of his generation, he never changed his views when money was involved. Financial matters simply did not exist in his conception of the world; he had zero interest in anything to do with money.

More important to him was the possibility of making a difference without being noticed. That



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