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# Harrania-Hedesunda

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Hedesunda is a Swedish village lying on Dalälven, the country's biggest river. It is home to Birger Forsberg, a professor at Konstfack, the leading college of art and applied arts, in Stockholm. Concerned at the drying up of creativity increasingly manifest in his students at Konstfack, Forsberg was deeply impressed by the 1960 exhibition of work from Harrania at the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm. The now famous village weaving school outside Cairo set up by Professor Wissa Wassef became the inspiration for a Swedish equivalent. The friendship between Forsberg and Wissa Wassef led to the twinning of Harrania and Hedesunda as well as to the flourishing weaving workshop for local children in Hedesunda, and the summer camp for village children and visitors from all over the world.

The camp is located on a small peninsula (known as the 'island'), jutting into the wide river which meanders into a lake-like expanse at this point. This is Viking territory; the earth is rich in iron deposits. The large town of Gävle, some 45 minutes away by bus, developed into a big fishing port, a centre of trade, shipping and shipbuilding. Today the leading paper and car manufacture industries are located here and Gävle is home to the Swedish Railway Museum, as well as being a fine cultural and sports centre.

I took my three girls to the camp for two weeks last year and we were all made very welcome. Experiencing a Swedish summer was of course a highlight - bathing at all hours was possible. The camp buildings themselves are quite unique; designed by Ralph Erskine, a British architect who moved to Sweden, they are a type of log cabin inspired by Sami (Lapp) dwellings. The cabins were not quite finished at the time we stayed there; a communal meeting and eating area with washing facilities has yet to materialize. Forsberg fundraises incessantly: he has had to work assiduously over the last 30 years to assure local authorities of his commitment. Meanwhile the Swedish outdoor WC and tap with spring water, not to mention the river, served us all handsomely. Doing our laundry by the riverside, near the large iron dye cauldron, was all part of the experience - a thoroughly Swedish experience.

Village children in Hedesunda, Sweden, are of course in many respects very different to those in Harrania, Egypt. However, this is a rural part of Sweden, somewhat depressed since Chernobyl, where a sense of active community still exists though it is fading. Textile handwork traditions have survived, so a textile workshop is not a foreign transplant. What was new was making space for children to do tapestry weaving without cartoons. Over these three decades many sizeable pieces for public areas have been made in the workshop. The summer camp, on the other hand, is more of a 'fun' experience. Visitors come from all over the world, especially since Forsberg made many international connec-

tions in his work at Konstfack. While we were there, a former student from Ghana dropped in for a few days. Forsberg did not lose the opportunity to ask him to help with tarring the wooden cabins!

Assisted as necessary by two of his daughters, Forsberg follows the advice Wissa Wassef gave him in 1966:

1. Make sure the children get peace and quiet when they are working. They should never have an adult giving opinions or standing behind them.
2. Teach the children the basic technique and let them work it out from there.



Left: Sara, weaving, with friendly advice

Below: The dye cauldron by the river Photos: by the author



3. Take them for walks, for instance in the Swedish forest, and let them absorb their impressions.
4. Pay the children a little from the very start. Then they will feel that they have done something real that is worth payment.
5. Have a five-year plan; if you have not achieved anything in that time, you can stop.
6. Let the children dye their own wool.
7. Use fairly fine wool so that they can give form to their ideas even in small weavings.
8. Continue as you started, with the option to come after school and without hard and fast rules or time restrictions from adults.
9. Give neither too much nor too little praise. Let the work grow from the children themselves. Give them appropriate work conditions.

This year, the range of activities has widened to include, apart from dyeing, weaving and raku pottery, week sessions in drawing and painting, watercolours, creative music, and woodwork. For families who would like to experience some of the other attractions in the area, there is a regular campsite and good bathing facilities down the road on the Hedesunda 'island'.

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