

Games in the 1800s



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Boksidan

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This book summarizes a number of testimonies about the life in Sweden during the late 1800s. The testimonies were collected by Nordiska Museet, with help of interviewers spread all over the country. The interviews were carried out in the beginning of the 1930th. The object of the interviews was to ask old people about their memories from their childhood. The interviews used here are foremost from Jämtland and Dalarna. But other one's describes the same things, which indicates that they were pretty typical for the Swedish country side at that time.

Translated from Swedish to English by Google translator and Gunnar Björing.

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It may seem as if the children in the countryside in ancient times did not have much to play with. But even then there were plenty of opportunities to have some fun. With sticks laid out on the farm land, small children could build barns and pastures. And fir cones became cows, horses, sheep, goats, lambs and kids. A frizz cone was a dangerous bear and flower buds could be hens.



The toys were called "donan".
Which was the same word as we
used for the penis, since young boy
often play with their penis.

When we got older, we produced more advanced toys. As arrow guns, which was very popular with our boys. They we used for example to shoot sparrows and great tits. But if it came to light of the adults could be plenty of beating.

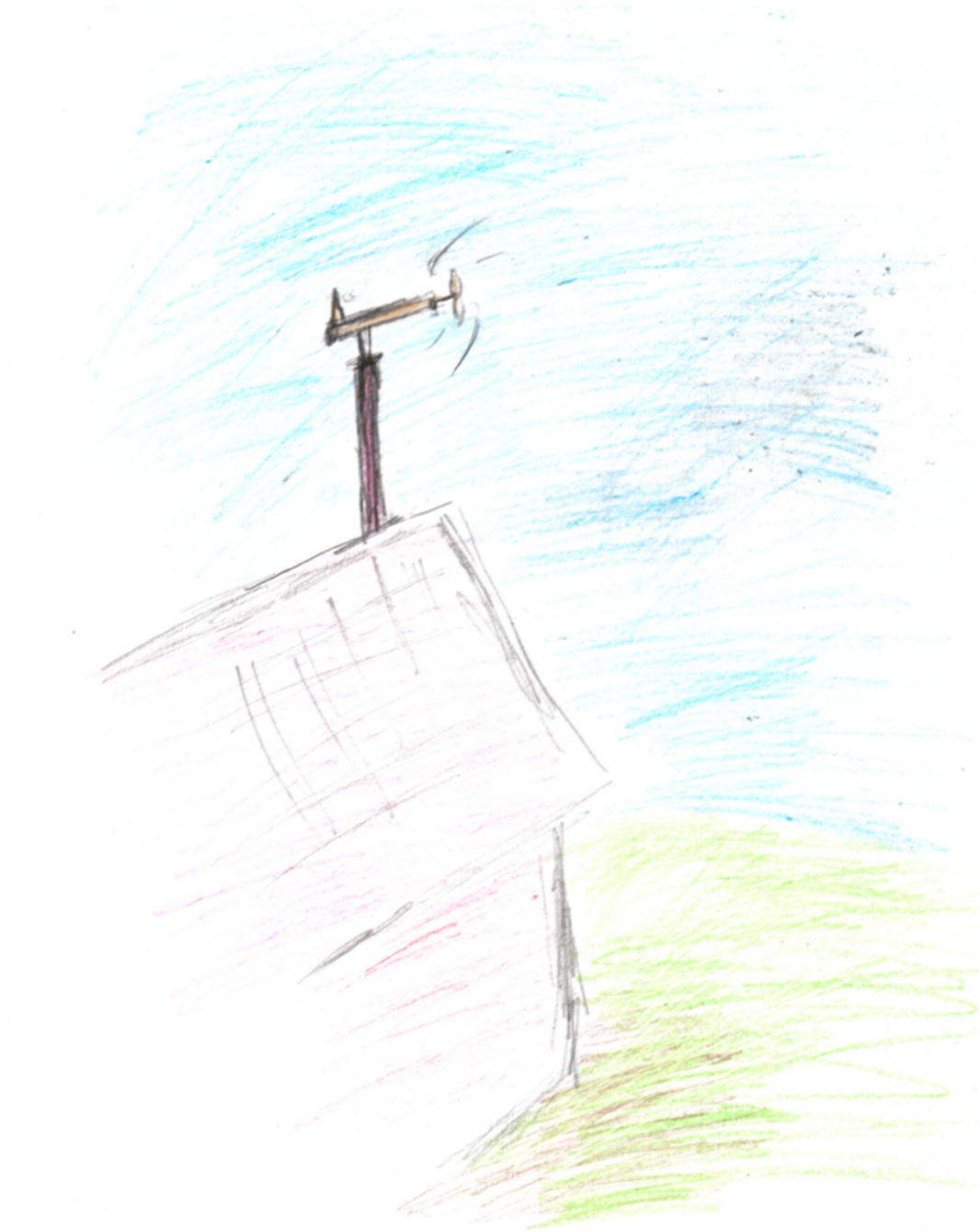


Arrow guns we made of long wooden slats with a slot on top for the arrow. In order to make the arrow to go a long way, it was very important how it was carved. Clumsy arrows did not go far. Thin and well-made arrows, however, could go away almost like pellets from a shotgun.

In the spring, it was common for boys to peel the bark of sallow to make willow pipes. And its familiar sound was a sure sign of spring. It was such a pleasure that some boys tried so early in the year that the bark could not get off without getting destroyed. But if it was the right time and we found the appropriate sallow, it went off fairly easily.



Another sound that could be heard was the noise of the wind mills. When the eagerness to make wind mills came over us boys, you could sometimes see and hear up to a dozen mills at once. These produced a terrible noise, which finally made one of the fathers of the village so angry that we were forbidden to put up more.



Wind mills consisted of a long wooden tree with a tail at one end, and a propeller on the other. The mill was installed at the top of a stick, which in turn is attached to one of the farm's outbuildings, such as a granary or a barn. At the slightest breeze the mill turned and the propeller began to spin. What made the noise was that around the peg that the propeller was attached to, there where a piece of thin metal that was knuckled when the propeller was spinning.



At the time of potato harvesting we used to amuse ourselves by throwing potatoes buds. We sharpened one end of a stick and putted a potato bud on it. Then we swung the stick quickly until the knob came off and went out in the sky.

This game could entertain a long time, if it not happened that someone crashed one of the farm's windows.

Christmas was a celebration even at that time, and on Christmas Eve we kids got wheat buns. We also got cheese, porridge and stockfish. We did not like stockfish, but we had to taste it. And we got a beverage that mother had brewed herself. Sometimes we had even a light on the Christmas table. And if we had a pig, then dad slaughtered it before Christmas, so we had some fresh meat. It happened also that we got a caramel.

After we had eaten and thanked for the food, my father read the Bible, and then we went to bed.

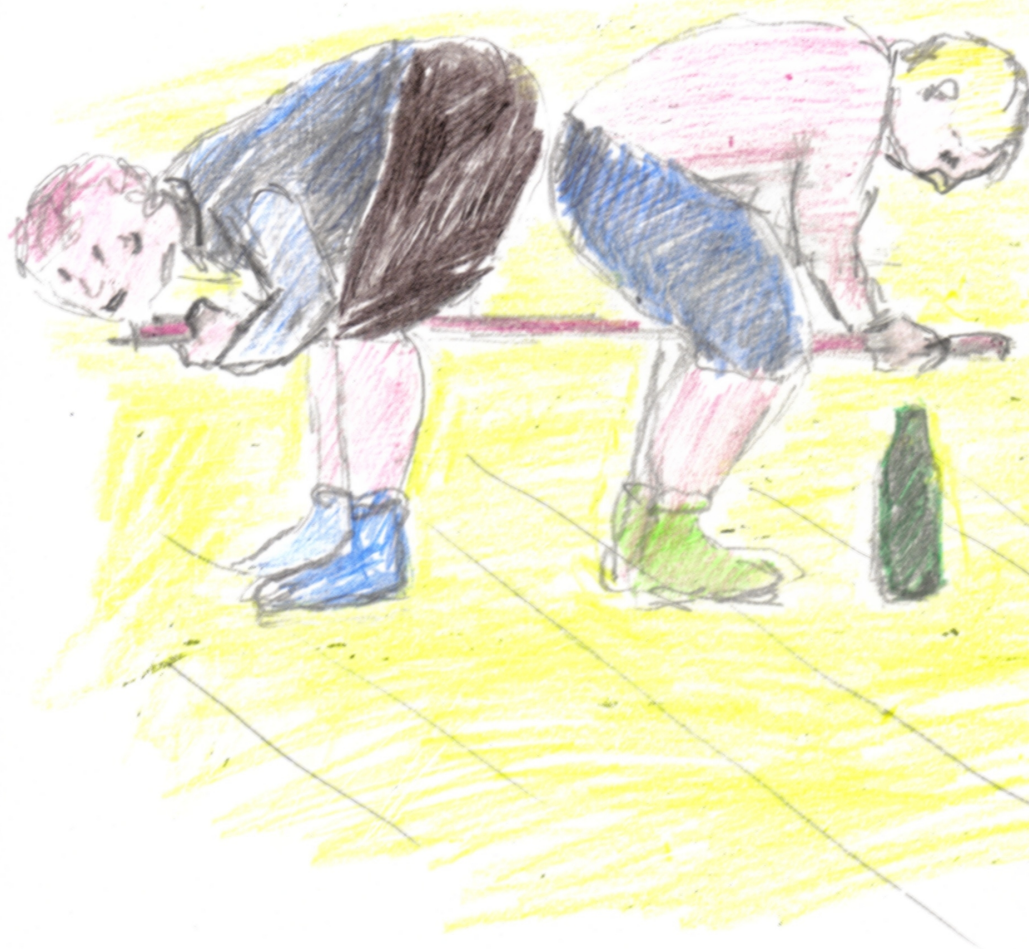


There were candles in the Christmas tree, and we also did cut some beautiful paper to put on it. In the fireplace we had real logs. Normally there were, of course, only small branches.

When we became so grown up that we could help out on the farm, there was not much time to play, except on Sundays. Then we did a lot of different games, both indoors and outdoors.



We could take “spänntag”. Then two people sat on the floor with their backs supported against each other, with knees pulled up high and heels pressed hard into the ground. The game was all about who could straighten their legs. The other one then either lifted from the floor or was forced to let go with heels.



other games, like "Stomp the eyes of the shoemaker," one had to be quick. Two kids stood with the asses toward each other and with a stick between their legs, held in their hands. In front of one of them stood a bottle. The one who was facing away from the bottle would try bumping the stick on it, but the other person would steer away so that he missed. When the former managed to bump into the bottle the roles were altered.



Another game called "Draga klönhandsk" and it went on so that two kids were standing opposite each other and grabbed each other's hands so that the nails were pushed into the other's wrists. Then they pulled. It was very painful. I saw myself how some pulled so hard that they tore up the other's wrists very bad. It was almost strange that no one got blood poisoning because we were usually very dirty under the fingernails. As a rule, we washed ourselves only on Saturdays.

One could also "turn the knuckle." Then one of the contestants putted his fist on the table. The other struck with his knuckles on his hand. In the battle it was important for both to hit the opponent where it was the most painful, with his own hands most insensitive part. After each stroke we changed roles.



Some kids were so god at this and their knuckles were so hard that they carved the skin of the opponents knuckles.

Sometimes we competed in agility too, like when someone sat on the floor and put a coin on the tip of the big toe. He would then, with help of his hands move a foot up to the head, while he bent his head forward until he could take the coin with his mouth.



The hard thing wasn't to take the coin with the mouth, instead it was to make it stay on the toe all the way.



In this game we putted three equally high chairs beside each other and one of us had to lie down on them. He would lie to his neck and head rested on one chair, the butts on the middle, and the feet on the third. Then he had to make the body totally stiff and lift the middle seat back and forth over him as many times as possible.



If we happened to have a ladder we could compete in climbing on it with bare hands. The competition began with hanging on the ladder with both hands. Then one had to move one hand quickly to the nearest overhead pole and further up, as far as you could.

Many games were to deceive anyone. They could start with that all the boys who did not know the game had to go out of the house. The rest of us putted a small stool next to a big bucket filled with ice cold water. Then we covered both the bucket and pallet with a rag and a girl sat down on the stool. She pretended to be a widow mourning her dead husband. Then one boy at a time came into the room and had to comfort the poor widow. He sat then on the bucket and fell down into the cold water, which of course was very fun.



Another variation was to put a chair beside the widow. But then her hands instead were smeared with grease and ash. When the boy then sat down next to her, she began hugging and patting his face until he was completely black. Then we all laughed like crazy.

Pawn games, as "Mary's purse" were also popular. It went on so that all but one set in a circle on the floor. That one had no place instead he went from one to another and said:



"Virgin Mary sent a purse out on the sea, and you can buy anything you want except black and white and say what you want, but yes and no. What have you bought?"

Then you had to say something and whoever asked tried with different issues to make him say any of the banned words. If the person succeeds you have to leave a deposit to him. Then, when all been asked, everyone had to take a punishment to get the deposit back, which was the most fun part of the game.

The one that had all the deposits stood with all of them behind his back, so that no one could see them, took one in hand and said: What punishment the owner do to get back this thing?

It was the most fun when we decide what the punishment should be.

Common punishments were, for example, to kiss a girl, bite one of the toes, run three rounds around the cabin, or chopping timber. The latter was done so the head of the punished was pushed hard against the logs of the cabin and pressed downwards.