

Take time to meet R.I. President Rolf J. Klärich . . .

MAN OF THOUGHT, MAN OF ACTION

by Walter Erko

A PERSON STANDING on the veranda of Rolf and Käthy Klärich's beautiful house in Espoo, near Helsinki, Finland, can easily imagine himself on the deck of a coastal cruiser touring the Finnish archipelago. The wide, boundless waters of the Baltic Sea meet the sky on the horizon in the south, but to the east and west the coastline is dotted with thousands of pine-covered rocky islands. The place is characteristic of Rotary International's new skipper: it gives a feeling of unlimited space, it draws one close to the basic elements of Nature, and it creates an atmosphere that brings freedom to the mind.

The Baltic Sea has played a major role in the destinies of the nations and individuals—including many Klärichs—living within its sphere of influence. Like the Mediterranean, this ancient watery thoroughfare has led not only to innumerable ruthless wars but also to peaceful cooperation and the exchange of human culture between the inhabitants of its shores. Migration has played a significant part in this development. It brought the Finnish tribes to their present home, led the adventurous Vikings to build their settlements all along the Baltic shores, and also inspired the enterprising merchants of the Hanseatic League to establish their trading posts and even penetrate deep into Russia.

The Baltic political map has changed from time to time. At times it has favored—at other times prevented—the movements of individuals across the borders. In 1692, when the first Klärich settled in Finnish Viipuri/Viborg, Sweden was at the height of its power. Christian Klärich

Opposite page, top: Rolf and Käthy at their lovely home.

Far left: It's spring, and the family Klärich celebrates May Day in the traditional Finnish way by wearing the university students' white cap. From left: Käthy, Birgitta, Rolf, Yvonne, and Monica.

Left: "God bless you and your highly beneficial and blissful work," was the greeting made to Rolf by His Holiness, Pope John Paul II at a special audience following Rotary's Rome convention.

practiced glove-making, a skill which may have been traditional in his family. He was descended from French Huguenots, who had emigrated first to the Netherlands and later to northern Germany, where the surname Klärich acquired its German form. (It is pronounced "Clair'rik" with a soft "ch," as in the Scottish "loch.") During this epoch, the Klärichs obviously received quite a few injections of foreign blood, the beneficial effects of which can still be seen in the cosmopolitan character of the contemporary Finnish head of the Klärich family.

According to the official history of the city of Helsinki, President Rolf's great-grandfather, Frans Heinrich Andreas Klärich, was elected a Helsinki alderman in 1870. The history also tells that he successfully ran a tobacco factory. In 1884, the business was taken over by President Rolf's grandfather, Andreas Woldemar Klärich. Grandfather Woldemar also gained historical publicity, for somewhat different reasons. He loved good music, and was himself an amateur performer of almost professional competence. One of the Klärichs' most treasured family heirlooms is a newspaper clipping about a concert in which Messrs. Jean Sibelius (a Rotarian) and Woldemar Klärich played together in a string quartet.

However, Woldemar's most significant contribution to music was made in 1882, when he, together with the conductor Robert Kajanus and another businessman, founded the Helsinki Symphony Orchestra. Woldemar Klärich promised to support the orchestra with an annual contribution of 10,000 Gold Marks.

World War I and the Russian Revolution ruined many families and changed the destiny of many nations. The Klärich family found itself in Oulu in the northern part of Finland, only 160 kilometres south of the Arctic Circle. Rolf A. Klärich, Sr. was offered the post of managing director at the Oy. Merijal Ab. candy factory, and thus it was in Oulu that Rolf, Jr., was born, and lived for 52 years of his life.

Rolf Johan Woldemar was the youngest of four chil-

'We need eloquent speakers to spur us on to greater action, but even more we need doers,'

Once Kathy's class made an excursion to eastern Finland, and she and Rolf met by chance. And there and then Rolf proposed. Was Kathy prepared to accept him? Hardly. But you don't know Rolf: a year later, after Kathy graduated from the College of Commerce, they were happily married and settled down in Oulu.

Thus started a most harmonious partnership, based partly on their similar backgrounds, education, cultural interests, way of looking at things—and partly on the differences in their characters—which complement each other. Rolf's vivacious temperament is counterbalanced by Kathy's composed serenity. And naturally there was the most important of all factors, true love.

They have three daughters: Monica, Yvonne, and Birgitta. All three are in professions serving handicapped or suffering people. Monica is an occupational therapist in a home for senior citizens; Yvonne works in municipal day care centers with children suffering from speech defects, and Birgitta is a fully qualified specialist nurse at the University Clinics in Helsinki.

Kathy, with her special academic training as business correspondent, has undoubtedly been a great help to Rolf. She has also done a wonderful job in creating their beautifully planned and tastefully decorated home. Interior decorating—along with Rotary-related activities, the local Red Cross, and literature—is one of her favorite hobbies.

One episode shows how deeply grateful Rolf is for all the help and encouragement she gives him. Kathy received her Paul Harris Fellow award as a big surprise from 1979-80 R.I. President Jim Bomar at the Williams-burg zone institute in Virginia, U.S.A. It was a fine gesture of appreciation accompanied by a cordial speech by President Jim, who quoted a stanza from Andrew Arnett's poem:

*Sweetheart, I thought you'd like to know,
That someone's thoughts go where you go,
That someone never can forget
The hours we've spent since first we met.*

Rolf Klärch's interests have never been confined to his business career and the Rotary movement. The needs of disabled war veterans, as well as those of handicapped children, have always touched his heart. He greatly prizes the gold medal he received from the Fraternal Order of Disabled War Veterans for his services. In the field of sport, he has been an enthusiastic patron of football, and in recognition of his support he was presented with a gold badge of merit by the Finnish Football Association. The Finnish Central Chamber of Commerce awarded him its medal when he accomplished the reconstruction work in his business. Apart from the Finnish Cross of Liberty, the highest recognition of merit Rolf has received is probably the O.B.E. (Order of the British Empire), conferred in 1976 on the occasion of H.M. Queen Elizabeth II of England's visit to Finland, for Rolf's long service as a consul of Great Britain and for his endeavors towards good relations between the two countries.

The Klärchs were a happy family. Rolf's father devoted as much of his time as he could to his children and also to his hobby: photography. The hundreds of snapshots he took of his family provide a valuable record of the early years of Rolf and his brother and sisters. Oulu is now a major Finnish city, but in 1922 it was an idyllic small town, an ideal place for a bright and lively boy to grow up. The fast flowing Oulujoki river was important to its economic and cultural life. The lumber industry, shipping, and domestic and foreign trade were Oulu's main sources of revenue. The sea, the river, and the surrounding wild country incited young boys to Tom Sawyerish escapades. The breakup of the ice in spring and the log-floating in the strong current were especially exciting occasions, which sometimes led to dangerous situations. Rolf took his first involuntary bath at age four.

The old wooden benches of the Swedish Private School did not hold the same attraction for him. There were many telephone calls between home and school. "He is a bright boy—but a damn lazy one," was the judgment of the school principal.

The time of carefree boyhood ended for Rolf, and for most Finnish young men, very abruptly. The Russo-Finnish Winter War broke out in November 1939. Nothing could hold Rolf back from enlisting, without his parents' consent, as a volunteer. On July 17, 1941, he was severely wounded. His recovery can only be considered a miracle, helped by Professor Richard Faltn's surgical skill, Rolf's own immense faith in life, and his Finnish *sisu*, a special, untranslatable characteristic that is a mixture of courage, fighting spirit, and obstinacy.

The war was over for Rolf in 1943, and he began thinking about his future. Undoubtedly, he wanted to take up medicine, but after the first two years of study he realized that he would have to help his father with the business. He enrolled in the Swedish University College of Commerce in Helsinki, finished the course in record time, and received a degree in economics in 1947. He completed his studies at the City of London College in 1949. After acquiring some business practice by serving in various firms, he was ready to take over from his father. During his 23 years at the helm of Oy. Merial Ab., Rolf modernized the machinery, improved the production process, and instituted a long range construction program. In 1960, Rolf became the sole owner of this enterprise and set his alarm clock for 1972. That was the year he figured he would have achieved his objectives and be ready to retire. In 1973, he did just that.

Such an approach is characteristic of Rolf Klärch. He starts by doing thorough preparatory work, makes a lightning-fast decision, then carries out his plans with drive and energy. How successfully the method works shows even in his marriage. Kathy Heimberg and Rolf met at college, when Kathy was a freshman. Time passed—nothing was said, no feelings were shown—but obviously something was brewing all the time.

In time Rolf graduated. Kathy continued her studies.

Who's Who in Finland mentions that Rolf is a talented amateur photographer and that he enjoys traveling—not a bad thing for an R.I. president! Something not mentioned is that Rolf and Käthy have a summer house in Sotkamo in northern Finland. They are great lovers of wild and undisturbed nature and try to spend as much time as possible in the wilderness. There, where white sandy beaches border the great chain of crystal clear lakes whose waters feed Rolf's beloved Oulujoki river, Rolf and Käthy feel transported into another world.

But even in remote Sotkamo, Rolf, a member of the Helsinki-Helsingfors club, doesn't worry about Rotary attendance. The Sotkamo Rotary Club (34 members) has named him an honorary member, calling him "Super Rotarian."

Rolf has said that his involvement in Rotary is merely a hobby. Some hobby! His Rotary records reveal a Rotarian who, during the past 27 years, has devotedly and efficiently served his organization in many offices and on many levels: as charter secretary of the Oulu-Merikoski Rotary Club in 1953-54, club president in 1957-58, governor of District 140 in 1959-60 and 1969-70, R.I. director in 1970-71, R.I. second vice-president in 1971-72, and R.I. president-elect in 1979-80.

One of the basic Rotary principles that Rolf and his charter colleagues in the Merikoski club (a 2800 percent Rotary Foundation club) adopted says that a Rotarian has only one opportunity to say "No," and that is when he is asked to join the club. Rolf has been faithful to this principle through all these years, except in 1955 when he was confined to bed after a car accident.

Rolf's Rotary philosophy is fairly straightforward. It starts by emphasizing that the individual Rotarian is not able to serve in full if he ignores the basic rules and principles of Rotary. Rotary, he feels, is not "lip service"—Rotary means active participation.

"We need eloquent speakers," he says, "to spur us on to greater achievements, but even more we need doers. We Rotarians have a strong sense of reality. As businessmen, men of professions, and civil servants, we realize that we can't change this world in a short while. But we can be realistic optimists."

The themes of R.I. presidents of the past five years all have the same purpose: to inspire and to motivate. Can a message which doesn't promise any benefits but which demands a readiness to serve humanity sound inspiring and motivating? Rolf thinks so.

Rolf's many friends in the Rotary world know that he will meet all the great demands of the office which he assumes on July 1. Whenever Rotary calls, Rolf Klärich will not say, "No." He will act. ●

● Walter Erko, governor of District 142, has contributed articles to professional magazines—he is a retired school superintendent—and has served as Finnish local editor of the regional magazine *Rotary Norden*. Walter is a club-mate of R.I.'s new president in the Rotary Club of Helsinki-Helsingfors.



Above: The wide Oulujoki River was a watery schoolroom for would-be loggers, including young Rolf, poised at right.



Left: Father and son. Though he was an active and enterprising businessman, Rolf A. Klärich, Sr., made it a point to spend lots of time with his family.



At the 1959 international assembly in Lake Placid, New York, U.S.A., Rolf (second from right), incoming governor of District 140, awaits his turn to greet R.I. President and Mrs. Clifford Randall.

Below: As president-elect, Rolf represented Rotary International at the 1979 meeting on refugees and displaced persons convened by the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.



ALAIN GASSMANN, GENEVA