

# How it all began

KERSTIN BACKMAN

THE FOUNDER OF  
ROQUETA  
MAGAZINE



When we first relaunched Roqueta in June this year we were delighted to be contacted by Kerstin Backman. She told us the story of how Roqueta was first published, against all the odds. Every day we meet readers who are so happy that the magazine is back in print, as it has become an important backdrop to their own Menorca story. We would like to thank Kerstin for her initiative and perseverance to get Roqueta up and running. Here she tells us how it all began.

Dear Liz and John,

Although many years have passed since I left the island, I try to keep in touch and follow what is going on. I am delighted to see that the project I and my ex husband devoted our life to 52+ years ago which eventually, despite censorship and many other problems during the Franco era, saw daylight in 1973. It is up and running 50 years later! I hope and trust that your venture will be a lot smoother and less problematic than ours. We were young, devoted and fortunately quite naive - or else it would never have happened!

Before coming to Menorca, I was working in tourism, mainly in Spain, for a Swedish tour operator. I spoke Spanish and was used to working in Spain. My ex-husband worked in publishing and was third generation in a family printing company in the UK. After seven years together in the UK, we decided to do something totally different.

We, Richard Whewell (Ricki), myself Kerstin (known as Swedish Tina, since no one could pronounce my name) and our 5 year old son Nicholas settled in San Cristobal (no Menorquin names at all back then) in February 1971. Our intention was to provide something we felt the island needed and was missing, i.e. a magazine in English directed mainly to the visitor but also to foreign residents. The fact that during the Franco era all media were extremely restricted, surveyed and censored, was an unexpected blow for us.

I started working in a local travel agency and my husband, together with a handy Englishman,

started Menorca Homes & Gardens whilst pursuing our magazine idea. We were thoroughly vetted by Dr Mateu Segui and D.Guillermo de Olivares from El Diari, who came to our home in San Cristobal to check these weird strangers with surprising ideas. We were approved and allowed to produce a monthly supplement in English to the daily local paper. A way to see what we were up to and under their control.

The setting procedure turned out to be a nightmare and an endless adventure in itself. Since nobody spoke or understood English, I had to spell each word, letter by letter, to the man who did the setting with lead type! This took place late at night or early in the morning after he finished the next day's Diari. The printing was on an old Heidelberg and the quality really poor. Not at all what we had hoped to produce.

In the square behind the market there was a printing company, Imprenta Sintes. Manuel Sintes was a charming man who gradually became a friend. Believe it or not, he held a still valid, unrevoked, Permiso Legal for a publication named Roqueta (the Menorcan nickname for their island). There is much more to be said about this, but in short, he liked our idea and eventually Roqueta saw the daylight. Annette Bell (Anabel) sold adverts for us and later contributed articles.

My husband and I parted company and he left the island. I continued running Roqueta, eventually together with an architect I was working with, Javier Hernandez Montesinos. We decided to print in Palma at Ultima Hora, which meant a move to colour and a much-improved quality. I certainly remember Henry van Eck and her beautiful daughter Pia who was on the first front cover. Here are some photos from El Festival Internacional de la Canción in Teatro Principal, where Geronimo Marques (from Ciutadella) and I were comperes. The festival was held two years running. The third photo is from one of Henry's Boutique Pian fashion shows, where I was the comperer, in 1974 if I remember correctly.

When we moved to San Cristóbal (now Es Migjorn), only two foreign families lived there. One of them is the Russell family. Rusty and his wife became good friends. His son is living in Mahon and his older brother David is now the world-famous guitarist. We had some wonderful evenings in the Russell gallery/cave underneath their house, listening to David giving recitals. I have since followed his tremendous career with great pride and interest. It was also in San Cristóbal where we met Annette.

We were considered mad living so far from work and school in Mahon. El Sereno (the village night watchman) asked if we could take his son to and from school, so he too could attend La Salle. We did. This caused quite a stir in the village and several families wanted to follow suit. After two years we moved to Mahon and by then La Salle was running a regular school bus to SC!

You may know that Nicholas Parsons and his wife Denise had a house near San Luis. He was a well known TV personality, loved the island and wanted to do something behind the camera for once. His dream was a documentary about Menorca's culture and history. This became a reality, when he became the producer of a film that was made over a whole year, showing the different seasons, fiestas and activities. I became a production assistant, negotiating permits to film on the islands in Mahon harbour (then military), access to palaces in Ciutadella and much more (the film is now available on You Tube thanks to Steve Morgan - see purple column).

The most dramatic occasion was when the film crew had arrived for the first time. All was set to start. Only one thing was missing: the main camera was stuck with Customs at Barcelona airport and would not be released. Franco's control and censorship were not to be played with! The crew was ticking money and Nicholas was desperate. The director, a BBC man Eric Davidson, and I went to Barcelona. I was pleading and explaining in tears to many ice-cold men in uniform and we were sent from one office and authority to another. After two days the camera was released and filming finally commenced!

In February 1978 after 7 years, and with Roqueta in its winter hibernation, my mother became ill and as an only child I had to leave Menorca suddenly and return to Sweden. My focus was getting my son settled in a new school with a different language and building a new life for us in my home country. Roqueta's destiny was not my main concern then.

Menorca has left many imprints in my life. When my husband Staffan and I got married in 1987 it was Suzy (Nicholas Parson's daughter) who helped us organise everything in London, in the Swedish church. I have and value several friendships from back then and we are regularly in touch: Swedish Annette (Bell then, Crosthwaite today... yes! another Annette Bell), who had Boutique Gemini in C/ Angel. She returns regularly, usually in August. We meet in Sweden and UK. Belgian Greta (Nelissen, now Møren), who worked in tourism and later promoted high-class Menorcan shoes around the world. She comes back to the island once or twice every year and we are frequently in touch. British/Spanish Margaret (Gray then, Thomas Adams now) who once with her husband ran Bar Nelson in San Vitamina. Later she had her own business at Mahon airport as a handling agent for foreign airlines.

Staffan and I have over the years spent much time in another part of Spain, Almunecar in the Granada province. Margaret came to visit, and liked our little town so much that she left Menorca after all those years and settled in Almunecar. Thank you Menorca for beautiful friendships!

To end my story, let me say that I am proud and delighted that Roqueta is still up and running and even celebrating its 50th anniversary! I wish Liz and John every success and all the best. Congratulations!

With fond memories and best wishes

Kerstin Backman

## EUREKA!

(AKA I'VE FOUND IT!)

By Steve Morgan

OK, first of all a little bit of background... Over 10 years ago, I saw a VHS video (younger readers, ask mum and dad about those) entitled 'Last of the Quiet Islands' which was presented by Nicholas Parsons (again, refer to mum and dad or see Kerstin's article adjacent).

It was a fascinating look into Menorca in the 1970's with questions as to how it would develop in the future and whether it would suffer the same fate as Ibiza & Mallorca with 'over tourism'.

There's too much in the film to detail here but to whet your appetite, we get to see the start of the development of the 2nd golf course at Shangri-La, an interview with Santiago at Bucaneros and much more.

I was so enchanted by the video, I copied it onto my PC and gave the VHS video back to the owner. A few weeks later, my PC suffered what was then known as the 'blue screen of death' and all was lost. Back-up? Er... Well, I was going to do one but I was very busy at the time, honest! So, I spent the next 10 years (not all of it of course) trying to find another copy.

I wrote to Nicholas Parsons' agent, no reply; his daughter, no reply; and even tried through contacts at Anglia TV where Nicholas used to produce many programmes, all to no avail. Nothing on the internet, it was as if I dreamt the whole show!

Then, one day my friend Cassey said she had found an old video at the back of the drawer with just 'Menorca' written on it, so not the one I had seen. I then contacted 'Arxiu d'imatge i so de Menorca' a government department in Mahon who deal with old films & photos of Menorca, who arranged to have it digitised and, yep, you've guessed it, it was the video I've been looking for!

So, I've uploaded it to YouTube for you to enjoy.

Just go to YouTube and, in the search window, type 'Last of the quiet islands (Steve Morgan)', make yourself a cup of tea (or coffee), break open a packet of digestives (other biscuits are available) and have a look at Menorca as it was in the 1970's.

My work here is done!

