

I AM ST. HELENA HOSPITAL

Birgitta Karlman: Imported from Sweden

A beautiful accent, red hair and perfect grooming are the hallmarks of Birgitta Karlman of the Center for Health. Birgitta has been at St. Helena Hospital since early 1995, and is a native of Malmo, Sweden.

Birgitta grew up in the dual traditions of the Seventh-day Adventist religion and the healthcare profession. Her mother was a physical therapist in her own business and her father was a minister. As a teenager, Birgitta spent many summers working in Adventist Health centers.

Birgitta obtained her nursing education in Stockholm, in a modern 1500-bed hospital. She started her career in med/surg and, after specialty education in pediatrics, moved into pediatric intensive care. She taught nursing and worked for the public health system, where, she says, “99% of new babies and their families are seen by public health nurses in Sweden.” One part of the work she loved most was working with immigrant families from many countries, learning the interesting customs they employed to keep their babies healthy and safe, and the challenges they faced in a new country.

Birgitta had begun work on her Master’s degree, but detoured a bit when she met and married Anders Karlman. Anders had attended school in the United States. The young couple decided to make their life in the U.S. and emigrated to Portland, Oregon, where Birgitta continued her education and obtained a Master’s of Science in Teaching. Simultaneously, she worked at the “old” Portland Adventist Hospital in staff development, and was there during their transition to the newly-built hospital.

She and Anders then moved to Marin, where their children, Jenny and Alexander, were born. Birgitta attended graduate school at the UCSF and obtained her Master’s degree in Nursing Administration. Later the couple decided they wanted to raise their family in the Napa Valley, and Birgitta joined the Center for Health team at that time.

A veteran coordinator of the former McDougall program, Birgitta credits Jeff Bensky, Center for Health interim team leader, for what she has learned this year about beginning a new “business,” i.e., the ONE program. She exclaims, “I am also fortunate to work with medical director Dr. Heather Peña and the Center for Health staff. I love working with the programs, having the opportunity to meet fascinating new people, and finding ways to manage, educate and make a difference in our clients’ lifestyles. Nursing is a profession that offers variety and many opportunities to grow.”

Birgitta is a cancer survivor, and feels enormous gratitude toward her family, friends and colleagues for the loving support she was given during the most stressful year of her life. Lessons learned, she says, were “You must be resilient. You must be positive. If things are hard today, there is always tomorrow; life is not static and things change. It’s a lesson that applies throughout life.”

