



FARFARS MAMMAS SOFFA av Anna Bengtsson
GRANDPA'S MUM'S SOFA by Anna Bengtsson

The family tree: In the centre are Olof and Nanny, who bought a kitchen sofa.

In a summer cottage is an old wooden sofa. It shows its years of use and could do with a coat of paint. But once it was new.

1915: It was more than a hundred years ago. Olof had got a job at the offices of Banankompaniet* and was going to marry Nanny. They needed a sofa for their kitchen, the kind that you can both sit on and sleep in. Olof's father came along and tried the sofa. He had arranged a ride for them, too.

1918: The sofa was kept very occupied with everyone who sat on it. On Sundays the extended family came to visit. Olof and Nanny had had a child, a boy named Henrik. There was a shortage of food. Countries near Sweden were at war*, and therefore boats carrying food imports couldn't get to Swedish ports. There was no real coffee, and the potato harvest was bad. The harvest of swedes (or Swedish turnips) was better, though, and they could be used in soups and mashes as well as pancakes.

1921: It was a Sunday in September. Henrik was four years old. The war had ended, and it had become easier to get cheap firewood, so they no longer felt cold indoors. They celebrated the fact that Henrik's mum and grandma had voted for the first time ever, since women had not been allowed to earlier.

'Finally we're having our say as well,' Nanny said.

If Henrik could have his say, he'd never clean his ears. If the sofa could have its say, all kitchen sofas would have a person in them at night. It had Henrik. And a cat.

1927: For Henrik's tenth birthday his grandpa brought him a fine present – a bicycle! By this time Henrik had three siblings as well! They had moved to a bigger flat, with a flushing toilet inside and hot water! The sofa didn't want to move. It was unhappy, until grandpa painted it bright red. And then it was joined by TWO people at night, the twins Inga and Gunnar.

1932: Several years later the family was living in a three-bedroom flat with a view over the port where the America liners* moored. Inga wanted to become a sea captain when she grew up, preferably on an America liner. Olle, the youngest, wanted to become a pilot who guided the ships safely into port. The sofa, which had been painted again after the second move, wanted most of all to become an America liner itself, and cross the oceans. But Henrik dreamt of

flying. He was 15 years old and worked part time as a bicycle messenger.

1939: War broke out in the world outside*. There was a ban on driving cars because there was almost no petrol. So it was a good thing that grandpa had a bicycle workshop, because many people needed their bicycles repaired. Gunnar and Olle helped out. Big brother Henrik was away guarding Sweden's borders, and had started flying for real. Now it was Olle who slept in the sofa. Sometimes he had nightmares about the angry lady next door – but the sofa creaked reassuringly until he quietened down.

1945: The new war had finally ended, after six years. This called for a celebration! Henrik came home from his flying and had a fiancée, Margareta! They sat on the sofa. Both Olle and Gunnar also wanted to sit next to her, and started fighting about it. A Norwegian had stayed with them for a while – he had fled the Nazis in his homeland. And of course there was a kitchen sofa he could sleep in! The sofa was the only one who knew that he had a pistol.

1955: Ten years later Henrik and Margareta were married and had two children. Gunnar had become a fireman and had his own wife and children. Inga had moved to Norway. Olof, their father, had died and only little brother Olle was still living with Nanny. They had found a smaller and cheaper flat, and the sofa got repainted again. When all the grandchildren came to visit and sat on the sofa at the same time they could barely fit, though the sofa tried to make itself as wide as possible. The more the better, it thought. Sometimes fireman Gunnar would drop by, and when Nanny wasn't looking he'd put a whole potato in his mouth, straight from the pot. He thought that tasted really good.

1966: When Nanny turned 75 the whole extended family came to celebrate. Gunnar wondered why Olle had never left home, and they started arguing about it. Cakes, soft drinks and coffee were served in the best room, but the kitchen sofa wasn't invited!

So the kitchen's not good enough for parties, is it, thought the sofa. So nobody's going to spill cream on me. No jam and no crumbs. It creaked disappointedly.

1975: It was a long time since anyone had slept in the kitchen sofa, even though it had been painted again. Instead there was a pile of newspapers on it, which wasn't really the same thing. The sofa heard sounds from the best room in the evenings – they were coming from the TV. But when Henrik's son, Hasse, came to visit he always wanted to be in the kitchen and sit on the sofa. He wanted to hear grandma Nanny tell him about how things were when his dad was small, when they had a privy in the courtyard and had to take baths in

a metal tub in the kitchen. Hasse had his own baby now, and her baths were in a proper bathtub.

1983: Nanny was 92 years old when she died. Olle stayed on alone in the flat when she'd gone. He wasn't much of a cook and needed a bigger fridge-freezer for all his boxes of pizzas and frozen ready-made meals.

'That means the kitchen sofa has to go up in the attic,' Olle said to his big brother, Henrik.

Stop right there, thought the sofa, just sit on me and everything will be all right! But Olle's mind was made up, and he and Hasse carried it up to the attic. It tried to make itself as heavy as it could, but that made no difference.

1983-2002: The sofa ended up among other old things. This isn't much fun, it thought. It's so dark, you can't see what colour I am. And while I'm not alone, everyone up here seems to be fast asleep. To think that I'm no good anymore, the sofa thought. People have slept in me and sat on me all this time, and I've stood up throughout it. Oh well, oh well.

But after a few years it was fast asleep like all the others.

2002: One day the sleeping pieces of furniture were woken up by the sound of steps and voices on the stairs.

'Over there is the old kitchen sofa,' Olle said. 'You're free to take it if it hasn't fallen apart, it's been standing here for twenty years.'

I'm not falling apart, thought the sofa. Nor am I rotting! I was made of the best pinewood from the forests of Värmland. I've been a real a pine tree. And then it was carried downstairs again, to a new world that it didn't quite recognise. And it got to ride in its own trailer!

The present: So the kitchen sofa got its new place in Hasse's summer cottage, and now maybe it'll get a new coat of paint too.

I knew that life wasn't over yet, it thinks contentedly.

*Banankompaniet – Sweden's biggest importer of bananas, founded in Gothenburg, began importing bananas in 1909.

*The America liners – Swedish passenger ships that plied the route between Gothenburg and New York.

*The First World War (1914-1918) – a war mainly fought in Europe but which involved large parts of the world.

*The Second World War (1939-1945) – a war comprising many large and small conflicts fought in different parts of the world and in which horrific numbers of people died.