

JENNY LEVALLIUS

Mitan & Moni



THE TRUE STORY
OF TWO SWEDISH
SISTERS CHASING
THE AMERICAN
DREAM IN 1960s
CALIFORNIA



Mitan & Moni

JENNY LEVALLIUS

*For my mom Monica, and my aunt Mittan,
for having the courage to chase their dreams.*

*For my husband Nicklas and our kids,
Maja and Albert, for all their love and support.*

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Preface

The California adventures of my Swedish mom, Monica, and my aunt, Mittan, have fascinated me for as long as I can remember. When I was a young girl growing up in Sweden, around nine or ten years old, my mom and I watched a movie starring Goldie Hawn called *Seems Like Old Times*. When the movie was over, she casually said to me, “I’ve made clothes for her.” I was shocked to hear that my mom, an avid dog lover and the mother of four young kids at the time, had a personal connection to Hollywood. I pleaded for her to tell me more. What was this mysterious life she had lived in the US before we came along? Up until then she’d just been my mom, and now she was suddenly a woman with a fascinating past.

As I got older, I began dreaming of capturing this glamorous past in book form, but I had no idea how to write a book or how to get it published. The whole process seemed daunting in the early ’90s, so the idea was shelved.

Many years later I decided to go for it, and this time I got a little further on my book publishing journey. In the summer of 2010 I sat down with my mom and interviewed her for an entire afternoon. I even designed a book cover and created a draft layout of the whole book—something I loved doing as I was now working as a graphic designer—but the idea once again fell to the wayside. The story just didn’t feel complete without my aunt’s memories and images included, but flying over to see her in the US at that time didn’t happen, unfortunately. Then love with a capital ‘L’ came into my life, and shortly thereafter came an intense few years, in which my husband and I became parents of twins Albert and Maja. I put the book in a digital drawer and wondered from time to time if I’d ever complete it.

Fast-forward to August 2022. The thought hit me like a brick: What am I waiting for? I need to finish this book now and document their California adventures before it’s too late. I decided to go full speed ahead and immediately booked a week-long trip for that

November, to Naples, Florida where my aunt lives full-time and where my mom, who lives in Sweden, has a condo. I started to get very excited about the idea of finally bringing this book to life. After a long and fascinating interview with both of them, and some more images in my collection, I flew home and got to work. It felt like the stars were finally aligned and I was excited to feel so close to achieving my goal.

Months went by. Rounds of edits were done, more images turned up in long-forgotten basement boxes, and more stories were remembered and added. The book was starting to take shape, and the end result is what you are now holding in your hand.

I hope you will enjoy hearing about their story as much as I have enjoyed documenting the exciting few years they spent in California. And who knows? The book might even inspire you to pursue your dreams.



Mittan and Monica taking a trip down memory lane.
Naples, Florida, November 2022.

Prologue



Looking back now, it's easy to see that hints of what the future would hold for Mittan and Monica Frössle were there all along during their upbringing in the 1950s and '60s in the small Swedish city of Örebro. Fashion and beautiful clothing were always present in the Frössle household, and the lack of funds did not stop the three women in the family from dressing fashionably on a budget. The girls'

mother, Inga-Maj, would sew Chanel-inspired outfits, which her daughters would wear proudly at school. The girls took after their mother early on, designing and creating outfits for themselves—bringing their fashion fantasies to life was a fun and creative outlet they all held in common. Monica and Mittan were even participants in several fashion shows for children's clothing stores. In one of them, Monica was thrilled to get to wear a pair of pants with a front zipper for the first time—something not too common for girls back then.

Years later, the guidance counselor at Monica's school asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up. She replied, half-seriously, "A fashion designer." Unsurprisingly, her counselor did not support that teenage dream and advised her to bet on something more realistic, such as becoming a dental assistant. Oh, how Monica would prove her wrong!

When Monica was seventeen years old, *VeckoRevyn*, a magazine for young women based in Sweden, hosted a competition in which readers could submit an entry explaining which celebrity they dreamt of meeting and why. The prize for the winning submission was their wish granted. Monica was so excited about this prospect, however small, that she immediately wrote in to share her long-held dream of meeting and dancing with Sammy Davis Jr., an American singer, dancer, actor, and comedian.



Top: Young Mittan and Monica in late 1967, in Altadena, California.
 Right: At the beginning of their crochet career, the girls found an inspiring note in a fortune cookie.

Unfortunately, she didn't win the competition. Another girl was awarded the opportunity to meet Michael Landon and the fictional Cartwright Brothers from the popular TV show *Bonanza* instead. Little did a disappointed Monica know then that only three years later she would be sitting in a hallway at NBC Studios in California talking to Sammy Davis Jr., and that shortly thereafter he would order, and wear, a few crochet pieces created by Monica and Mittan.

But let's go back to the beginning of this amazing story.

The Big Move

Mittan and Monica, born four years apart in the late 1940s, learned how to sew from their mother, and how to knit from their father, when they were each around six years old. Their father Georg was also a creative soul who loved using his hands to bring his ideas to life. His most admired creation was a grandfather clock that took many years of carving, sanding, and dedication to complete.

Monica learned to crochet when she was around seven years old, from sixteen-year-old Alice, who lived down the street. “But I knitted almost exclusively when I was growing up. I knitted sweaters for myself from the time I was ten, eleven years old. I loved creating pieces and seeing my outfit ideas come to life. We only started crocheting more just before we left for the US. That’s when we started crocheting properly,” Monica remembers.

The year was 1965, and twenty-one-year-old Mittan was studying psychology in Stockholm. She felt a flash of inspiration one evening after completing her studies and decided to crochet a sleeveless top in green. She also added some beautiful glass beads onto it that were the same color as the yarn, to give it a little bit of extra sparkle. It came out so pretty, she thought. On a whim, she decided to send the top to one of Sweden’s most famous jazz singers at the time, Monica Zetterlund, adding a note that said, “Dear Monica, here is a sweater I made for you. Would you be interested in buying it? All the best, Mittan.”

The singer wrote back that she loved the top and generously, and unexpectedly, sent Mittan money for it. The first crochet piece was officially sold.

That same year, twin daughters of a family friend had just returned to Sweden after spending a year in Altadena—a neighborhood north of LA in California—as housekeepers for two wealthy American families, the Goldens and Gordons respectively. Now in need of new housekeepers, both families were keen to hire two new Swedish girls.



Mittan and Monica posing in two dress samples from their first collection by the Golden's pool in late 1967.

That's when Lena, a friend of the twins, decided to go work for the Gordon family. Spending a year in sunny California sounded very appealing, she thought. The twins then asked Mittan if she would be interested in working for the Golden family.

"I didn't think too much about the decision to go. I just said yes and felt it would be an exciting adventure. The plan was to go over there for a year and then go back home to continue my studies," Mittan says.

So, off the two girls went to California in the summer of 1965—their first trip to America. The decision to leave their home country would change the trajectory of their lives forever.

Years later, Lena married the son of the Gordons, Phil, and remained in the US for the rest of her life. Mittan's story will be revealed in the pages to come.

Of those early days in California, Mittan remembers, "I crocheted a lot at the Goldens' house when I had time off. There wasn't much else to do in Altadena in the evenings. So, when I had free time, I crocheted to keep busy, and ended up making lots of clothes for myself. I also did a lot of sewing and hemming for the Goldens as well and did a lot of embroidery for Mrs. Golden (Celia) on her sweaters and tops. She thought they were a bit too plain, so she asked me if I could embroider flowers on them to make them a bit more unique. She was very pleased with the results." It was during this time that the seed of an idea was sown in Mittan's mind. The Goldens were so impressed with her crochet skills that Mittan thought it might be a great idea to start a business crocheting clothes. If Mrs. Golden loved her pieces, maybe others would too.

One of the memories that sticks out the most for Mittan during this first year in California was when she joined the Golden family for a weekend getaway to the Cal Neva Resort and Casino in Lake Tahoe, which at the time was owned by the famous singer and entertainer Frank Sinatra. The family stayed in a charming and luxurious bungalow, and Mittan found it funny that even the bathrooms had telephones in them, something she had never seen before. Mittan was also fascinated to find out that the resort had tunnels under it, which were frequently used by the mafia to get around the place without being seen by the police.

The family was sound asleep one night when four impeccably dressed men suddenly walked in the front door, awakening and scaring Mittan half to death. The men looked a bit confused in the darkness, and they did not appear to be quite sober. After a quick look around, not finding whomever they had intended to see in the bungalow, they quietly exited the unit without saying a word.

Mr. Golden went to the manager of the resort the next morning and told him of the incident. He and his family lived on the



Cal Neva Lodge in the 1960s.

top floor of the hotel with armed guards on either side of the double doors that led into their apartment. He replied to Mr. Golden: “Oh, that was probably Frank Sinatra’s buddies out looking for him. He usually stays in that condo when he’s here. And, by the way, you should probably lock your door when you go to bed.” Instantly, the frightening incident turned into a fun story to tell friends back home.

Mittan returned to Sweden in the summer of 1966 after a very pleasant year with the Goldens, completely in love with the US. When she landed at Torslanda Airport in Gothenburg, Sweden, where her sister and parents awaited, she immediately informed them, “I’m going back!”

That fall, Monica was studying statistics and political science in Gothenburg when a teachers’ strike broke out. She hadn’t been the slightest bit interested in these subjects but had chosen to pursue them after prodding from her school’s guidance counselor to choose a degree that would come with a “guaranteed job” once she graduated. Monica, who had secretly been thinking about dropping out of



Monica at the hospital in Örebro, Sweden in September 1967. She brought a camera with her during one of her last days at work to capture her beloved colleagues on film, as well as herself, before moving abroad.

school for a while, found the strike to be the perfect excuse to head back home to Örebro. She quickly found a job as an assistant in the local hospital's radiology department and felt that this job might bring her closer to her dream of becoming a radiology technician or possibly even a doctor. She loved her new job and hoped to stay there for a long time.

When Mittan returned to Sweden, rather than resuming her psychology studies, she took a job as a substitute third grade teacher in Köping, a small town not far from their hometown, Örebro. Her intention was to save enough money to go back to the US. When

Monica left school a few months later, Mittan attempted to convince her sister to move to the US with her.

“This business would be so much more fun to do together,” Mittan pleaded. Monica was quite resistant at first and didn’t want to leave her friends and her fabulous new job, but she slowly started warming to the idea. In early 1967, after a few months of wavering and uncertainty on Monica’s part, they finally agreed to partner. Her new hospital job ended up being only a temporary solution as her goal now was to save up just enough money to go to the US with her sister. They set to work designing, knitting, and crocheting as many pieces as they could before leaving so they would have a finished collection to show potential customers once they arrived in California. The duo decided to call their brand *Mitan & Moni of Sweden*, a name they felt had a nice, international ring to it, and the new spelling of their names felt a bit more unique.

The sisters’ plans were thrown for a loop though when the Goldens’ new housekeeper suddenly quit that summer and they desperately wanted Mittan to come back right away. So Mittan hastily went over in August by herself to work for the Goldens once again. Monica made it over a few months later, on October 27, to be exact, with their mother Inga-Maj as her travel companion. Their last two days in Sweden before leaving were a bit dramatic though, as an unusually strong fall storm hit the area and left them without power for two whole days. This presented mother and daughter with quite the packing challenge, but they made it work.

“We had worked so hard before we left for the US and had a lot of finished pieces with us—a whole suitcase full of twenty to thirty pieces—and we continued crocheting even more pieces once we got there,” Monica recalls. Some of the dresses she had created in Sweden combined knitted and crochet pieces together, so a dress could have a longer knitted piece at the bottom with a separate crochet piece at the top in a beautiful accent color. But as the girls did not have access to a knitting machine in the US, they had to leave that combination style behind.

In the 1960s, Swedes could apply for a green card right away when moving to the US, instead of applying for a visa first as is the case today. The green card application process only took three to four months back then. As long as a Swede had someone in the US to sponsor their application, obtaining a green card was not difficult. Upon approval, Swedish applicants simply had to visit the US Embassy in Stockholm to swear an oath. Thereafter they would officially be granted permission to enter the country legally. The Goldens were Mittan's green card sponsors and they completed the necessary forms explaining the kind of work she would do for them. Mr. and Mrs. Golden also had to prove they could afford a housekeeper to ensure that Mittan would not be at risk of becoming a burden to the US government. Monica, on the other hand, was sponsored by the Goldens' grown daughter Cookie, as her housekeeper. Funnily, Monica ended up going to the woman's house only once, for Thanksgiving dinner, after she arrived in California.

"During the first fall, Mom and I helped Mittan with the housework at the Goldens' so she would be done with her chores faster and we could sit and crochet together the rest of the time. So, we were sometimes guests, sometimes housekeepers," Monica laughs.

"For the first two to three months, I probably cried every single day," she remembers. "I just wanted to go home, even though Mittan and Mom were there too. We lived together in one room at the Golden house for the first few months. It was a beautiful house with a big pool and tennis courts, the weather was fabulous, and yet the only thing I wanted to do was go home to Sweden.

"I don't know what was so difficult about it really, but when we watched the news on TV, I didn't understand much. Everyone spoke so fast and everything felt new and different and I missed my friends and my job."

Mittan begged her not to go home. "Give it a few more months. It will pass. Things will get better. You'll get more used to it," she pleaded. She thankfully turned out to be right.



Showing off some of their early designs in the Golden's backyard.





Mittan and a young Wendy Golden modeling coats.



Monica wearing two of her combination dresses – knitted on the bottom, with a crochet part on the top.





Mittan wearing a burgundy combination knit/crochet dress.



Above:
Monica wearing a green combination knit/crochet dress.



Right: In a white crochet dress.



Above: Mittan and Monica ready to climb to the top!



Monica posing in two samples from their first collection and slowly warming up to the sunny California weather and lifestyle.

Right and below:
Monica in a light
pink dress.



Mittan and Monica in the Golden's backyard wearing
a few dresses from their first collection.



Monica modeling some more dresses in late 1967.



Left: Mittan showing off a unique design by the Golden's pool.

Below: Mittan in a green dress.



The Fortuitous *Vogue* Meeting

An impressively bold Mittan decided that when they got to California, the sisters should start at the top and work their way down, if need be. So, naturally, she called the West Coast editor of *Vogue*, a Ms. Eleanore Phillips, introduced herself, told her who they were and what they were doing, and asked if they could come over to the *Vogue* office and show her their pieces. She was elated when Eleanore extended an offer to meet at the end of November 1967. Mittan's mission to get her foot in the door at the top was a success!

Mrs. Golden had said to them, "Please, girls, you can't start there. It's too 'pie in the sky.' You should take it easy in the beginning and go slow." But Mittan thought they had nothing to lose and everything to gain, so she boldly went for it.

"We prepared as best we could and made sure we had our best pieces ready to show," she says. "We didn't have the sense to really be nervous, which was probably a good thing. We got into Mrs. Golden's car, a red Buick Riviera, and drove to the meeting with *Vogue*, where a lovely and elegant woman greeted us. She had gray, short-cropped hair, slightly combed back, and was quite tall. Everything about her was stylish and perfect. And here we were, lugging our old, worn-out suitcase, containing about twenty crochet pieces, into her office.

"She didn't say anything at first, when looking at our pieces, and continued to be silent for quite a while. Then, to our enormous relief, she finally began to give us some feedback, but she said only things like 'too long' or 'needs to be shorter' when we held them up one by one." The "mini" fashion had started to come over from England, inspired by British fashion designer Mary Quant, so skirts and dresses were now getting shorter and shorter. "That was a quick and easy fix for us, we thought, but by then we were sure she didn't like our outfits as she wasn't really saying anything that felt positive about them.

"We were starting to lose hope. But then she finally started asking us some questions about our clothes, which felt like a positive sign.

She called a few other people from *Vogue* into her office to see what they thought as well. Finally, she said, ‘I’m going to make some calls,’ and if the West Coast editor of *Vogue* calls you with a tip, then you listen. We didn’t sleep much after that fortuitous meeting,” Monica chuckles as she remembers that life-changing moment.

While the duo were still in her office that afternoon, Eleanore first called Saks Fifth Avenue and recommended that they meet with the sisters. The girls knew of

this exclusive American department store but had never dreamt that their clothes could be sold in such a place. She also called Carrie White, who had a very popular hair salon in Beverly Hills at the time.

“She asked us if we knew who Carrie White was, which we didn’t. Turned out she was the new ‘it’ hairdresser in town and everyone who was anyone wanted to get their hair done by her,” Monica recalls. Eleanore had taken Carrie White, who was around twenty-five years old at the time, under her wing and was a bit of a mentor to her.

Before the meeting was over, she also called the Paraphernalia store in Beverly Hills—the iconic luxury shopping district featured in numerous Hollywood films and television shows—as well as The Shop for Pappagallo, also in Beverly Hills. She said to them, “You have to see what these two Swedish girls have done!”

“A few days later, Saks called and asked us to come in for a meeting,” Mittan recalls. “We were very flattered but didn’t really feel that our clothes fit the elegant Saks aesthetic. The styles we designed at the beginning of our business were very different from the ones we were creating two years later, when our pieces had a different level of sophistication to them. However, the buyers at Saks thought differently. They really seemed to like our creations, because, only a few days after the interview, they called us back.”



Eleanore Roberts-Phillips
Colt. West Coast editor of
US Vogue and *House &
Garden* magazines.

SIDEBAR: Inga-Maj's mother, Judith, came to New York City in 1913, at the age of twenty-one, and began sewing furs in the garment district without any prior experience. She had no idea how to do it, so she just watched how others did it and then copied what they were doing. When someone said to her early on, "We don't do it that way here," she just replied back confidently, "But this is how we do it in Europe," and they nodded in reply. Apparently, guts and talent in the fashion industry ran in the family.

"We'd like to carry your clothes in our stores nationwide. How much can you deliver and how quickly?" the Saks representative inquired.

"Oh my, we can't produce that many pieces! It's just me and Monica who make all these clothes, so unfortunately there is no way we can deliver that much," Mittan replied, thinking that was the end of the Saks possibility.

"We understand, but we usually only bring in designers who can deliver to all our stores," the woman replied.

There was no way Mittan and Monica could find a solution to this predicament, so the duo were sure any kind of future collaboration was off the table. Nonetheless, the store's buyers promised to get back to them again with a definite answer after discussing the situation internally. A few days later, the buyer called them back and said that they had made the very unusual decision to carry the pieces exclusively at the Saks Fifth Avenue Beverly Hills location, on consignment. Saks wouldn't be buying the pieces from them, but Mittan and Monica could hang pieces there that they felt suited their store—a win-win solution for all involved.

Monica says, "Our first display was right as you got off the escalator on the second floor of the ladies' department—a prime spot. In the beginning, there were three mannequins in total wearing our dresses, all in white in different styles, with white silk ribbons threaded into them above the waist. The dresses hanging in the Saks store and on

the mannequins were of course for sale, so if they sold one, we had to go down there and replace it quickly. Luckily, we lived a short five-minute drive from Saks, so we could get there straightaway to replace a sold dress or to meet with a customer who might wish to place a custom order. We sat at home and worked most of the time, so it was easy to go down there at a moment's notice."

One of their earliest superstar clients from Saks was the fabulous Dionne Warwick. The store called the girls to come down there when the singer had come in and requested to order a maternity coat for a concert she was going to give in a few weeks. She ordered a white coat that would be buttoned up and also wanted it lined, something the sisters had never done before.

"Great! No problem," they replied to the request, hoping they'd figure out how to do that so it looked as high-end as possible. "It was, thankfully, the only piece we've ever had to line," Monica remembers. "It wasn't an easy process to sew the outer knit piece onto a less stretchy fabric lining underneath, but we made it work, and Dionne seemed happy with the result," she says with relief in her voice.

"This was also our first introduction to what pantyhose really meant," Mittan adds, laughing. "The women who tried on our clothes at Saks had no underwear on; they only wore pantyhose! This was a little shocking for us at first, being the modest, small-town women we were back then."

Dionne Warwick

Dionne (1940–), is an American singer, actress, and television host who has sold more than one hundred million records across the globe. While singing backup vocals early in her career, Warwick met the composer Burt Bacharach, who hired her to record demos and this eventually led to her landing her own record deal. She has won six Grammy Awards, as well as many others, and ranks among the forty biggest US hit-makers between 1955 and 1999. Ranked number seventy-four on the *Billboard* Hot 100's "Greatest Artists of All Time," she also had fifty-six of her singles make the Hot 100 between 1962 and 1998. She won the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019 and is a former Goodwill Ambassador for the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.



Monica and Mittan fitting a dress on a Saks employee.
All three women are wearing Mitan & Moni pieces.



At the Saks Fifth Avenue department store, on Wilshire Boulevard in Beverly Hills, with one of the store's salesgirls. All three women in Mitán & Moni designs.

Saks Fifth Avenue 611 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N. Y. 10022 00138944

VENDOR ABBREV.	DEPT.	STORE	NO.	DATE	REGISTRY NO.	VENDOR INVOICE NO.	GROSS AMOUNT	DISCOUNT & ANTIC.	NET AMOUNT
MITAN	60	3	1/17	22242	9528		190.00	15.20	174.80
MITAN	60	3	1/17	22243	9529		50.00	4.00	46.00
MITAN	60	3	1/17	22244	9530		130.00	10.40	119.60
MITAN	60	3	1/17	22245	9531		100.00	8.00	92.00
MITAN	60	3	1/17	22246	9532		130.00	10.40	119.60
MITAN	60	3	1/17	22247	9533		230.00	18.40	211.60
MITAN	60	3	1/17	22248	9534		100.00	8.00	92.00
									855.60**

Saks Fifth Avenue 611 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N. Y. 10022 00047141

VENDOR ABBREV.	DEPT.	STORE	NO.	DATE	REGISTRY NO.	VENDOR INVOICE NO.	GROSS AMOUNT	DISCOUNT & ANTIC.	NET AMOUNT
FROSSLE	60	3	2/09	81805	6964		120.00	9.72	110.28
FROSSLE	60	3	2/15	81806	6968		120.00	9.72	110.28
									220.56**

Mitan & Moni Frossle MEMO

Sold To Saks

Shipped To _____

Address _____

204	yellow dress	\$ 40.00
217	white dress w. multi colored belt	\$ 70.00
227	blue dress (kept)	\$ 70.00
232	blue dress and blue coat, breast	\$ 120.00
245	white dress and blue coat	\$ 50.00
267		\$ 80.00
277		
288		

MITAN FROSSLE
120 N. SWALL DR #102
BEVERLY HILLS
CALIF 90210

To Saks Fifth Avenue
in assignment

OUR NUMBER 9505
DATE _____
CUSTOMER'S ORDER _____
SALESMAN _____
TERMS _____
F. O. B. _____

INVOICE

Shipped To _____

Address _____

Nr 544		\$ 45.00
Nr 695		\$ 80.00
Nr 916		\$ 60.00
Nr 774, 804	at \$ 40.00	\$ 80.00
Nr 785		\$ 50.00
Nr 796		\$ 60.00
Nr 777, 787	at \$ 75.00	\$ 150.00
Nr 797, 807	at \$ 75.00	\$ 150.00

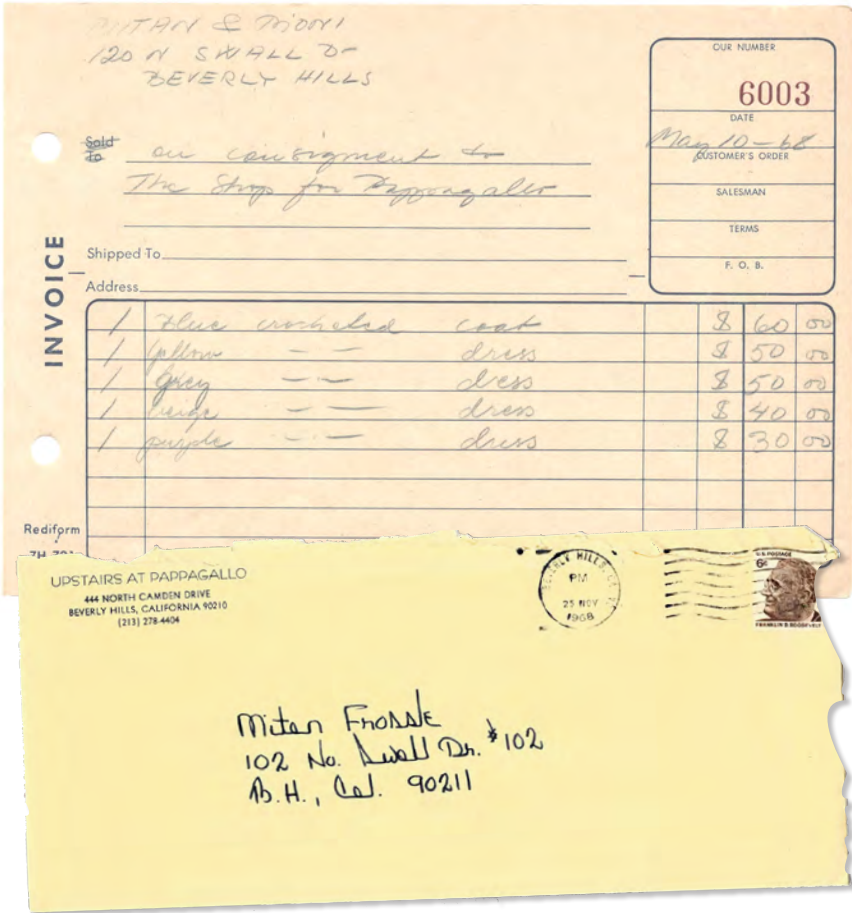
Rediform 7H 721

OUR NUMBER 6985
DATE March 28-64
CUSTOMER'S ORDER _____
SALESMAN _____
TERMS _____
F. O. B. _____

A handful of the many Saks Fifth Avenue orders delivered in the first six months.



Mittan's ambitious plan of starting at the top is off to a flying start!



The Shop for Pappagalto store on Camden Drive in Beverly Hills was a very different place from Saks, much less formal than a big, elegant department store. “Being there felt like you were in someone’s large, very hip, living room—with unusual lamps, cushy sofas, and beautiful antique cabinets creating a cozy and relaxed shopping environment,” says Mittan. It was mainly a shoe store, but customers could also buy bags and clothes. The men were often served a cup of coffee, a sherry, or a glass of wine while waiting for their girlfriends or wives to finish shopping. All the girls who worked there were twenty to twenty-five years old, and it was considered a very cool place to shop.

Below: Inside The Shop For Pappagallo store.



There are clothes from the Pappagallo line as well as other manufacturers. Two Swedish girls, Moni and Mit-an, design crochet dresses which can only be had at Saks and Pappagallo.

Right: An image of the Pappagallo storefront, along with an accompanying notice about the duo's designs.



An unusual fact about the store was that the salesgirls didn't get paid—not that they really needed to be though as they were all the adult children of big Hollywood celebrities or multimillionaires. Comically, they were also the store's biggest customers. People like Francesca Hilton, the daughter of Zsa Zsa Gabor (a Hungarian actress and socialite) and Conrad Hilton (the founder of the Hilton hotel chain) worked there, as well as a wealthy heiress who was dating Lee Majors at the time. "He was the star of the very successful TV show *The Six Million Dollar Man* and we got to meet him several times when he came into the store," Mittan recalls, with a bit of a swoon in her voice.



Carrie White

(1943–2022) was an American hairdresser, author, and spokesperson, known as the “First Lady of Hairdressing.” Carrie styled actors Elizabeth Taylor, Goldie Hawn, Ann-Margret, Elvis Presley, Sharon Tate, Brad Pitt, Sandra Bullock, and many others, during her career. She collaborated with photographer Richard Avedon on shoots for *Vogue* and her work has appeared in magazines such as *Harper’s Bazaar*, *InStyle*, *Allure*, *Vanity Fair*, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Mademoiselle*, and *Glamour*. She published the internationally best-selling autobiography *Upper Cut: Highlights of My Hollywood Life*, in 2011.

Left: A young Ms. Carrie White in her beauty parlour.

She continues, “We had the same arrangement with the Carrie White Beauty Parlor as we did with the Pappagallo shop. Carrie selected the pieces she liked and wanted to display in her shop, and then she received a small portion of revenue from every piece of ours that was sold in her shop.” The actual salon was on the ground floor, but one floor up, Carrie had smartly decorated a smaller room where she showcased some quirky, trendy items that her customers could look at, or buy, while they waited for their appointment—a very clever and entrepreneurial idea, Monica and Mittan thought.

In November 1967, the three Frössle women were invited to a holiday party at the Swedish Consulate in LA, where they got to meet Robert Vaughn, a very famous actor at the time and star of the hit TV show *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*—an exciting and glamorous moment, they all thought. The Swedish journalist Lennart Cedrup also happened to be at the event and found the girls’ newfound success worthy of writing about back home. He took a picture of the three of them and added a little blurb next to the image. This was the first of many times they would get articles written about their success in the Swedish media. At this glamorous event, they also got to meet a delightful fellow Swede, Hillevi Rombin, who had been crowned Miss Universe in 1955.



Above: Hillevi Rombin.

Left: Mittan and actor Robert Vaughn, at the Swedish consulate’s holiday party, November, 1967.



◀ Virka och stikka kan verkligen Inga Maj Frössle och döttrarna Mittan och Moni. De har redan virkat in sig i Vogues eleganta spalter. Inte illa!

An early notice about the sisters' success in a Swedish women's magazine.
Svensk Damtidning, no. 47, 29 November, 1967.

“Another highlight in those early days was New Year 1967,” Monica recalls. “The Golden’s had kindly invited us to spend the holiday with them in Las Vegas, while our mom stayed behind at their house to take care of their daughter Wendy and little dog. Mr. and Mrs. Golden flew to Las Vegas, while Mittan and I were going to get there by car, along with the couple’s son Bruce, who would drive the three of us there in the family’s new Cadillac.” As Bruce drove, though, it got greener and greener, and Monica thought to herself, “This doesn’t feel quite right. Isn’t Las Vegas in the desert?”

“Is it really this green towards Vegas?” she asked him.

“Don’t worry about it. I’m driving,” Bruce replied in a slightly irritated tone.

They stopped to fill up on gas, and there were guys with sombreros hanging around the gas station. Bruce asked one of them how far it was to Vegas.

The guy gave him a funny look and replied, “Well, you’re in Yuma, Arizona now, so you’ve probably got another four to five hours to go.”

Their four-hour drive from Altadena to Vegas had turned into eleven hours, a fact Monica laughs about today but which had not seemed too funny at the time. For the rest of the very long ride to Vegas, there was a tense vibe in the car to say the least, which put quite a damper on the start of the trip.

The next morning Bruce skipped breakfast, probably feeling more than a little bit embarrassed about the driving mishap. He had gone golfing early to avoid facing them all. Despite the rocky start, though, it turned out to be an amazing trip for two young women from a small city in Sweden, and a more impressive first visit to the City of Lights could probably not have been had. Mr. Golden got them all tickets to see jazz musician Louis Armstrong in concert, as well as to singer Wayne Newton's show, where they sat in the first row. Mr. Newton, nicknamed "Mr. Las Vegas," even spoke to Monica during the concert. "Smile," he said to her as he was singing, possibly wondering why a young lady was looking so serious at such a fun and entertaining event.

On New Year's Eve, they all got to see the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* at Caesar's Palace but, despite the glamorous events and surroundings, Monica was very nervous to be there. "I was a few years away from the legal drinking age at that time, so a bit too young to be able to enjoy all that Vegas had to offer, but I had a fake ID from Sweden, which I pulled out when the employees and guards at the casinos got suspicious that I was only drinking orange juice after orange juice. But I didn't dare to take any chances as I didn't want to get into trouble. I didn't gamble or drink any alcohol, just walked around the whole trip feeling like any minute I'd get kicked out," she recalls. Luckily, that never happened.

Mittan and Dick Golden (the oldest son in the family) had spent quite a lot of time together as friends during Mittan's first year in the US, and they enjoyed each other's company—even flying up to San Francisco to celebrate New Year's Eve in '65. They also went sailing occasionally and took day trips to other places around California together. Bruce and Mittan were also friendly, and he was always nice and polite to her, but he rarely spoke to Monica.

"He was quite a spoiled guy I thought," Monica remembers. "One time he sulked until he got his dream car from his parents, a yellow Lotus Europa." Once he got the car, he offered to take Mittan out for a ride in it and, a bit hesitantly, asked Monica if she also wanted to



Above:
Monica and
Mittan posing
by Bruce's
new car, a
yellow Lotus
Europa.



Left: The
Golden
brothers,
Bruce and
Dick posing
by Dick's
Lotus Elan.

come along. “Heck, yes!” Monica thought to herself. Surprisingly, though, he set her up on a blind date, for some unknown reason –with a guy she thought was drop-dead gorgeous to boot! Otherwise, Bruce completely ignored her back then. Looking back now, Monica wonders if he might simply have felt shy around her.

During these first few months in California, the girls did have a little bit of a social life though. The Goldens were very good friends with another family that lived nearby, the Dormans, who had three grown sons. Two of them were married, but one of them, Bob, was not, and he might have had a bit of a crush on Mittan. He, and his brothers and their wives, would sometimes take the girls out for dinner and show them around town, and one memorable day, Bob and his friend Ken took them to Disneyland where we had a great time.

Settling In

Life started to feel brighter and better for both Monica and Mittan after they moved into their own place about two months after Monica arrived. In the *L.A. Times*, they found a cute little one-bedroom apartment on Swall Drive at the edge of Beverly Hills, and they loved it. “It only cost 110 dollars per month, and we had a view of Wilshire Boulevard from our window. Not too shabby, we thought. Here we could fend for ourselves a little more and be free to do what we wanted with our time. However, our mother was still in the US, and would be there for another month before going back to Sweden. We didn’t want to leave her alone in the apartment, so we didn’t really go out in the evenings at all during those first few weeks. Also, since we weren’t sure how long it would be before we would get to see her again, we wanted to make sure to spend as much time with her as possible before she went back,” Monica remembers.

But Inga-Maj became a little less worried about her daughters after Monica got a job working at Konditori Scandinavia, a Swedish delicatessen and pastry shop on Camden Drive in Beverly Hills. She felt more at ease leaving them on their own in California, secure in the knowledge that they would be able to buy food and pay their bills if the crochet business took some time to become successful (or, worst case, didn’t take off at all). She left warm and idyllic California for the cold, dark weather of a typical Swedish winter in January 1968, returning home to her husband who had stayed behind to look after the house and to work. “She probably would have liked to stay there for the rest of her life though, if she could have. Mom loved to be in California,” Monica remembers.

Inga-Maj had decided to come to California because she thought it would be a fun adventure to share with her daughters, but she was also very good at crocheting, so she was able to help them out a lot with their orders in the beginning. Also, Monica was only nineteen years old at the time, so it was probably not so strange that Inga-Maj



The two young entrepreneurs working in their new apartment.

wanted to come along to make sure her girls got off to a good start almost halfway around the world. It sometimes felt like a very small world though, as when Inga-Maj left California, she sat next to Jan Malmjö on the plane. He was a famous Swedish actor who was married to American actress and dancer Barrie Chase at the time and, unrelated to this encounter, Barrie would become a very helpful friend to the girls later on.

Once they had their own place, and their mom had returned home, the two women quickly began getting comfortable in their new life. “I finally went out on my first real date, with a lovely guy named Mike Tillies,” Monica remembers. “On one of our dates he took me up to the beautiful and impressive Griffith Observatory in LA to watch the sunset, which was quite romantic I thought. But the dating didn’t last long though, as he had decided to join the Peace Corps and would be leaving for South America soon.



Altadena, California, January 1968. From left, Mittan with her mother Inga-Maj, Mr. Golden with his daughter Wendy, and Mrs. Golden in the car.

He needed to empty his apartment as soon as possible and was nice enough to give us all his furniture. Great timing for us, we thought. We got all of his things, even his toaster, absolutely free! A friend of his helped him out and they delivered everything to our place. Some things were too big to be carried in through the door though, so they had to bring them in through the window.”

The furniture wasn’t exactly beautiful, but it was practical and better than nothing. The girls got a bed, a sofa, lamps, a kitchen table and chairs, and some kitchenware. They also made their own one-of-a-kind coffee table using a door leaf they found on the sidewalk, which they placed on cinder blocks. The table measured about one-by-two meters, which was ideal because they could lay out lots of yarn and outfits-in-progress on it and get a great overview. “We thought the table was so cool. We always had a huge amount of yarn in front of

us, which provided inspiration as we sat on the sofa and crocheted for hours on end. There was also a floor-to-ceiling cupboard with double doors on it in the living room, inside which you could put a fold-down Murphy bed if you wanted to, but instead we had our yarn in there from floor to ceiling,” Monica recalls.

Maria Cole (an American jazz singer and widow of the world-renowned singer Nat King Cole), one of the sisters’ earliest customers, gave them some furniture and kitchenware for the apartment as well, which she sent over with her driver. “I still even have a plate of hers at home,” says Mittan, “and every time I use it, I think of her.”

The pair also had to adjust to the differences between Sweden and their new home. They really needed to get some groceries for their new place, so they asked a friendly neighbor where the nearest grocery store was.

“It’s just up the street a few blocks, Ralph’s, on Wilshire,” she told them. That sounded good, they thought, and so the sisters started walking. They walked, and they walked, and they walked, probably about ten blocks, eventually thinking they’d never get there.

“Turns out a US street block, especially around LA, is quite a bit farther than a Swedish block,” Mittan and Monica recall. “We finally made it to the store exhausted and hungry, bought our food, picked up the paper bags that the cashier had packed our food into, and started walking. However, the bags had no handles on them, so we had to carry all the bags in our arms all those ten blocks back to the apartment. That was more exercise than we’d gotten in all our first few months in California combined!” It was the first, and last, time they decided to walk to the grocery store. But people were so nice to them that day. So many cars stopped or slowed down and asked if they needed a ride, probably thinking their car had broken down. In retrospect, Mittan and Monica remember that crazy, calorie-burning afternoon fondly.

Besides learning how to get around their new neighborhood, the girls experienced a hitch or two in their new place. “There were only eight units in our building,” Monica explains, “and we had a

landlady who was very nosy and curious. She was always snooping around our apartment. The woman worked for a local bank, which owned the building, and they had assigned her to be the building's supervisor, so she had a master key to all the units. We could tell she was always checking on us from a distance. Once she even entered our apartment when we weren't home, although she was probably quite surprised, and maybe even a bit embarrassed, to find our mother sitting there by herself crocheting. When she saw our mom sitting there, she didn't say anything to her, just backed out, closed the door, and went back upstairs."

That's when the sisters finally decided to give her a piece of their minds. They went up to her and asked, "What on earth are you doing in our apartment when we aren't home? What do you want? If this doesn't stop immediately, we'll call the bank and tell them about this," they insisted.

It didn't happen again, although, in retrospect, they're not so surprised that she was wondering about them. "We were in and out of there at all hours of the day and sometimes night, carrying our little suitcase, and we took taxis or the bus everywhere because we didn't have a car in the early days. That might have seemed more than a bit odd to some, but of course it didn't justify her going into our apartment," Monica says.

When she remembers their early days in the US, Monica also thinks back to her first earthquake experience—a part of life for anyone who stays in California for a longer period of time. "The first one we experienced happened a few months after Mom had gone home in early '68. It was such a strange experience. I had seen a movie when I was little about someone who had a crocodile at home. It had hidden under a bed, and the bed had been rocked by the crocodile underneath it when it moved and thrashed. So when we sat on our chocolate-brown sofa and crocheted in the evening and the earthquake started, my first thought was, "Where's the crocodile?" The sofa felt like it just lifted up and everything started shaking. We didn't realize what had actually happened until it was over."

Business Takes Off

The sisters hadn't been in America for long before their work started to gain popularity. "The first two pieces we sold through Carrie White were to the lovely Maria Cole," Mittan recalls. "Carrie called us one day and asked if we could come into her boutique right away because Ms. Cole was there and wondered if we could make some custom pieces for her. Needless to say, we rushed down to Carrie's place." This was just before Christmas 1967, only two months after Monica's arrival, and this encounter turned out to be the start of a significant, and long-term, personal and professional relationship for the three women. Maria became their biggest customer of all time, purchasing a total of around sixty outfits over several years.

They showed up to Maria's home for the first time with their hands full of yarn and their minds full of design ideas. She lived in the exclusive Hancock Park area in LA, in a big, beautiful mansion with a gigantic pool. The house had two grand pianos in the living room, one black and one white, and a large master bedroom suite consisting of three rooms—one of which was decorated entirely in blue and white. Another room displayed Nat King Cole's unique collection of pipes (he had sadly died of lung cancer only a few years earlier). Such a grand house naturally also included a big backyard where they found a massive, cuddly St. Bernard dog running around, dog-lover Monica recalls. It was also the first time they visited a house

Maria Cole

Maria (1922–2012) was an American jazz singer and the wife of singer Nat King Cole, whom she married in 1948. She was later a co-host of the television talk show *Tempo*, which aired on KHJ-TV in Los Angeles in the 1960s. The couple had five children together: singer Natalie Cole, adopted daughter Carole, adopted son Nat Kelly Cole, and twin daughters Casey and Timolin. Nat was later diagnosed with terminal lung cancer and Maria stayed by his side until he died in 1965. Five years after the death of Nat, Maria bought 'South House'—a large estate in Tyringham, Massachusetts—where she raised their five children. Maria was married to screenwriter Gary Devore from 1969 until their divorce in 1978.



Massor av Hollywoods stjärnor bär klänningar från Moni och Mitan of Sweden. Alla vill bli fotograferade med de två svenskorna. På bilden är del Barrie Chases tur. Hon har Mitan TV och Monica fh.

De erövrar Hollywood med virknål



Fem svenskor virkar så närläna glöder. Fr v Mitan Frössle, Malou Widell, Christina Arnestedt, Monica Frössle och Eva Persson.

Mitan och Monica provar en av de virkade skapelserna på en av sina flitiga medvirkerkor, Malou Widell, som egentligen är mannekång i ropet i Los Angeles just nu.

Två flickor från Örebro har skapat ett nytt mode i Hollywood. Deras virkade klänningar har blivit den senaste flugan bland filmstadens stora stjärnor.

Los Angeles i januari
Två Örebro-systrar — den ena på väg mot akademisk examen i psykologi och den andra med planer på att bli civilekonom — har vänt upp och ner på klämodet bland film- och TV-stjärnor i Beverly Hills och Hollywood. Systrarna Mitan och Monica Frössle, 24 och 20 år, virkade ett par klänningar i följd mest på skoj. De tänkte inte på att sälja, men försökte ändå. Det var en verklig modebomb som kvevade. De Frössleska klänningarna är mer inne i Hollywood nu än något annat mode. Beställningarna strömmar in i sådan takt att flickorna fått anställa ett tio-tal unga damer. De flesta är svenskor och de sitter runt bordet i Monicas och Mitans työrummare varje kväll och virkar så närläna glöder. I kundkretsen hittar man Lana Turner, Dean Martins och King Coles fruar, Barrie Chase osv. Det är fordrande kunder som beställer ena dagen och kräver leverans da-

gen efter — man skall på ett stort party och kan inte gå utan en klänning från Moni och Mitan of Sweden. Moni och Mitan har blivit celebriteter i Hollywood och många av de andra svenskorna i virkgängset håller på att bli det. Där har vi Malou och Monica Widell från Kungsör, Eva Persson, Stockholm och Christina Arnestedt, Stockholm. Till och med mamma Inga-Maj sitter hemma i Örebro och virkar efter telefonbeställningar från döttrarna för att leveranserna skall kunna klaras av. Och en sak har Moni och Mitan lärt sig — ingen i Beverly Hills köper billigt — så deras klänningar kostar naturligtvis 200 dollar styck. Mer blir det väl, sedan de virkat åt Marlon Thomas för en TV-show. Hur virkventyret skall avslöpa vet ännu ingen. Mitan är förälskad i en advokatmiljonär som vill gifte sig med henne, finansstjärn vill satsa pengar och varuhusen vill köpa.



Headline: "They're conquering Hollywood with crochet hooks."

SVENSKA SYSTRAR



Mitan Frössle från Örebro är tillsammans med sin syster Monica (nästa bild) kanske just nu de mest omtalade och "inne" svenska systrarna i Los Angeles-området. Tillsammans började i

Kändisar i mängd är deras kunder. Till exempel Barrie Chase (Jan Malmströms f d), dansösen och skådespelerskan Cyd Charisse och fr

Onsdagen den 31 juli 1968

5

Minns ni systrarna Frössle ...?

Hollywood slåss om deras virkade kläder

DIAGNOS. Nya modeller i tygerna och stilar för "vad som säljer" i modevärlden har kommit långt. Det är systrarna Betty-Marie (kallad Mitán) och Monica Frössle ett bevis för. De gör just nu sensation i Hollywood med sina virkade kläder.
Under en period hade flickorna filmkostymerna med förkläden, kjolar, blusar och färg-Maj Frössle, i dagens. Många tog till exempel i kängorna. Sedan blev ängelmodellerna både sålarna värmdesaktiva/tygerna från Afrika flyttade som till till Dagertons och tillade sedan kängorna till för Mitan, Monica och Monica.
Lennart Österg berättar här om deras konstnärliga karriär.

Mitan Frössle från Örebro pågick psykologi på Stockholms universitet. Hon var konstnär och fick ägnas på konstskolan där. Hon var syster Monica blev skulptör och konstnär i Göteborg med förhoppning komma till på Konstskolan. Mitan föredrog med passionen garanterat med sista ut.

Det blev en hel värld för Mitan och Monica Frössle paraden i bästa till par rekorder och blev gästföreläsare i Beverly Hills, i samma ämnen som de tyger de sina tygerna för den världens mest betydande Vogue modemedicinska föreläsningen i Stockholm.

Mitan och Monica virkade kläder, kjolar och byxor blev i Beverly Hills berömda så till de konstnärer från första dagen. Många av dem har varit utvalda till det som och andra i Hollywood och Beverly Hills. Många till exempel genom att syster Monica har ingen annan och knäppt sig själv själv.



Top: "Swedish Sisters." Above: "Do you remember the Frössle sisters...? Hollywood is fighting over their crochet clothes."



Maria Cole (left) in a white Mitan & Moni dress, with Diahann Carroll, at the Watts Benefit at the Century Plaza Hotel, in 1968. Copyright @ Alamy Images.

with a staff of maids, all of whom wore uniforms—something they had only seen in movies before.

Maria adored all their ideas and wasted no time ordering pieces from the duo. The first few included a brown sleeveless dress with a round neckline that was very form-fitted, and a short-sleeved coat with a v-neck dress to match in the same material and color—like a sweater set, but with a dress instead. She also had a beautiful dress in her wardrobe that inspired her, so she asked the girls if they could make a similar one, along with another coat to match. They said yes, of course. This first meeting might also have been the highlight of their mother’s extended stay in California. Inga-Maj was a big fan of Nat King Cole’s music, so she was thrilled to have been invited to come along with her daughters to the house the first time they went there, and Maria was so kind and sweet to her.”

They went to see their new client often after that first meeting, and over time they would get to meet all of Maria's children, as well as her lovely sister Betty and her father.

"We ended up making the young Natalie Cole's all-white high school graduation dress as well, which was a fun project to do for our youngest client to date," says Monica. Maria often wore the duo's clothes on TV when she was working as a newscaster in LA, which was quite exciting for the sisters, but their names unfortunately never made it onto the credits after the show. Her clothes were officially sponsored by the Joseph Magnin department store, so when people would call in after the show and wonder where they could buy Maria's crocheted clothes, they wouldn't be able to find out where.



The sisters' mother, Inga-Maj, to the right, with Nat and Maria Cole's twin girls, Casey and Timolin, with a friend in between them.

The station was not allowed to reveal that she wore anything other than clothes from the department store. But Monica and Mittan were already working full-time by then, so they didn't really have time to take on any more requests, even though it would have been fun to see their names on the TV screen.

Jeanne Martin (the wife of American singer, actor, and comedian Dean Martin) did a similar thing as Maria, but at the store Paraphernalia. When they met up at the store for the very first time, she whispered to them, "I'll talk to you girls privately. I have to show you exactly the dress I want," which she had at home. She gave them her business card so the girls could get in touch with her to book a private meeting at her house. A few days later, Mittan and Monica headed over to the Martin's beautiful home for a first consultation.

"Jeanne was a beautiful person inside and out, and incredibly nice and sweet to us right from the start," Monica recalls. "She first took us to their large bar area and asked us if we wanted anything to drink. Then we continued through to the kitchen where she introduced us to their Norwegian chef, before we finally went to her amazingly impressive closet to start talking about designs. Most of her clothes and shoes, even her jeans, were tailor-made, so they would fit her perfectly—how amazing, we thought." Jeanne would become their second-biggest customer ever and one of their biggest supporters.

They found it very comical that whenever they went to see her, there were always tourists lurking outside on the street, looking for the Hollywood stars' houses and hoping for celebrity sightings. So the girls were frequently photographed when they visited Jeanne. "Even though the photographers had no idea who we were, they took pictures of us just in case, something we found quite hilarious," Monica remembers.

The first time they met Dean Martin, he appeared out of the blue by the door to the couple's bedroom—so they got to meet the big legend himself! "It was one of the few times I was genuinely starstruck," Monica says, laughing. "It was so unexpected to see

Dean Martin

Dean Martin (1917–1995) was an American singer, actor, and comedian. He is considered to have been one of the most popular and enduring American entertainers of the mid-20th century. His big break came in 1946 when he and comedian Jerry Lewis began performing in nightclubs. The duo continued their partnership by making numerous appearances together on radio, television, and in films. When Martin's partnership with Lewis ended in 1956, he went

solo as a performer and actor. Throughout his long career, he would perform on concert stages, and in nightclubs, record numerous albums, and appear in over eighty-five film and television productions before he died. Nicknamed "The King of Cool" Dean was one of the stars of the original *Ocean's 11* movie in 1960. He was one of the most popular acts in Las Vegas at one point and was known as one of the members of the 'Rat Pack' (along with Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Joey Bishop, and Peter Lawford). Starting in 1965, Martin was the host of the television variety program *The Dean Martin Show*, which centered on Dean's singing and comedy, and it enabled his relaxed and easy-going demeanor to shine. From 1974 to 1984, he was the roastmaster on the popular TV program *The Dean Martin Celebrity Roast*, which featured celebrities, comedians, and politicians.



Copyright © Getty Images.

Jeanne Martin

Born Dorothy Jean Biegger (1927–2016), in Coral Gables, Florida, she went by the name Jeanne when she began modeling in Miami. One evening, she went to a club in Miami to see a New Year's Eve show starring Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. Jeanne insisted that she had never heard of either entertainer until that night and, according to her, she and Dean fell in love at first sight. The couple married in 1949 and had three children together, while she also helped to raise four more from his previous marriage. For twenty years, they were viewed as one of Hollywood's happiest couples, until their breakup in late 1969. Their divorce caused nearly as much heartbreak to Martin's fans as his professional split with partner Jerry Lewis had. Dean and Jeanne reconnected after the tragic death of their son Dino in 1987, and they remained on good terms until Dean's death in 1995 from respiratory failure.



The up-and-coming crochet sisters posing with Jeanne Martin in the Martin family's backyard.



Above: Mittan and Monica.



Above: Mittan in front of the Martin's pool house.

Right: Jeanne and son Dino posing by their tennis courts. Jeanne in a Mitan & Moni dress.

Below: Monica, Dino and Mittan.



Right: Jeanne, in a Mitan & Moni pantsuit, sitting next to one of her best friends, actress Ursula Andress, and actor Jean-Paul Belmondo.

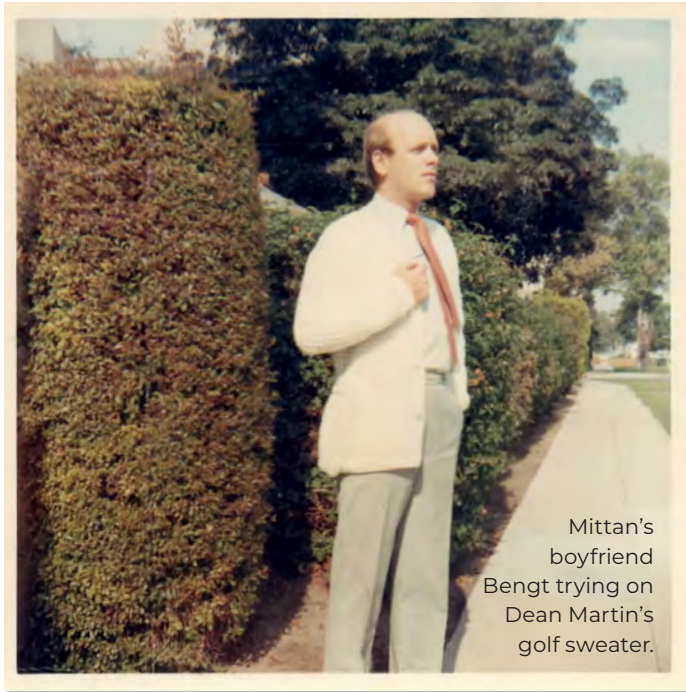


Below: Jeanne out and about in a Mitan & Moni pantsuit.



Below: In a long, blue Mitan & Moni cardigan.





Mittan's
boyfriend
Bengt trying on
Dean Martin's
golf sweater.

him there so suddenly that I felt a bit tongue-tied, but he had an incredibly charming charisma about him that managed to make you feel very at ease in his presence. It was no wonder women found him so swoon-worthy and men wanted to be like him.”

The girls were lucky enough to meet him several more times. “He was so charming, you can’t imagine,” Mittan recalls. “We even made him a cardigan once, in a Higgins model, similar to one we had made for Jeanne. My boyfriend Bengt (more on him later) had to jump in as a sizing model—a task I think he was more than happy to take on,” she remembers with a laugh. Dean even wore it once when the girls were at the Martins’ house. It would become his golf sweater.

“In retrospect, it would have been quite amazing to have a picture of Dean in that sweater, as well as of many of our other customers in our pieces. But we rarely had a camera with us, and it didn’t feel quite right to ask our customers if we could photograph them—people we often became very friendly with—in our clothes,” the two women admit.

It turned out that Dick's girlfriend frequently opened the door completely naked, and the sisters got a bit more used to it as time went by, thankfully. When they arrived for a meeting, they'd ask her, "Are we coming at a bad time?" She'd reply, "Oh, no, come right in!" She did in fact order some pieces from the duo, but they never got to see her wearing them, and still wonder if she ever did.

Jeanne really had no reason to help the pair get other clients, but she was always so nice and helpful to them, even offering to drive them to potential clients' houses, such as Dick Martin's. But early on, she was sometimes a bit reluctant to give out their phone number to her friends who asked for it, Jeanne admitted. She wanted to keep their clothes a secret so that her custom crochet pieces would feel even more unique. But her initial hope was eventually squashed when Cyd Charisse, a famous actress and dancer, and a good friend of hers, insisted Jeanne give her Mittan and Monica's number.

Monica, who had loved dancing from an early age, had admired Cyd for quite some time and enjoyed seeing her acting and dancing with Gene Kelly in several movies, so she was very excited to go over to her house for an initial meeting and get to meet her in person. Cyd was married to Tony Martin (also no relation to Dean Martin), a famous actor and singer who was the highest-paid performer in Las Vegas in 1958. The couple didn't live as luxuriously as many other Hollywood celebrities, but theirs was a lovely and cozy home, a one-story bungalow with a fantastic view of Beverly Hills and beyond.

While many of Mittan and Monica's celebrity client relationships came to them easily, there were some exceptions. One early memory from their California days vividly sticks out in both sisters' minds. "We unintentionally, and quite dramatically, put our lives on the line once when we had to get to a meeting in LA," Monica recalls. "This was before we had our own car, so Mrs. Golden generously offered for us to borrow her car to get to the appointment—if we promised to return it to her a few hours later when she needed it back.

"On the way back to her house, though, it started raining quite

heavily, and unluckily for us, the windshield wipers broke at the worst possible time. We pulled into a gas station to try to get them fixed, but the employees there couldn't help us. We didn't know what to do! Mrs. Golden had said she really needed her car back, so we had to find a way to get it back to her somehow."

It was evening and very dark outside, and the drive from Beverly Hills to Altadena, which was usually a half-hour drive, took over an hour. The girls drove on the oldest and curviest freeway in LA to get back and couldn't see anything at all out the window—an insanely dangerous way to drive.

"Our crazy solution was to have Monica, with her head sticking out the window, directing me as I was driving the car. She would instruct me, 'Turn left' or 'Turn right' or 'A little more to the left' or 'Slower!' The rain poured down my sister's back as she was hanging out the window, soaking her through and through." They finally made it back to the Golden's house in one piece, exhausted, hungry, and soaking wet—all the while thanking their lucky stars for a safe return. As they walked into the house, Bruce walked by and casually said, "Oh, you look wet" to Monica. That felt like the understatement of the year.

Thank goodness it hadn't been cold out as well, although they were still both feeling very chilly when they got back. Monica went straight into the bathroom to take a hot shower and change clothes. She came back out looking, and feeling, like a new person when she joined the rest of the group for dinner. "The whole experience was total stupidity," Mittan says. "That we even made it home was a miracle, but thankfully we did." In retrospect, it might have been a good idea to call Mrs. Golden to check if she still needed the car, and if not, they could have waited out the downpour somewhere safe. But they didn't think to do that, unfortunately. The sisters were just determined to get it back to her as soon as they could.

The pair also dealt with other transportation challenges in LA. They took the bus everywhere in the beginning, and it was quite



Mittan heading off to a meeting in the duo's new Mustang, purchased from 'Stan the Man.'

stressful as no buses seemed to be coordinated with each other—and they all seemed to be run by different companies. They showed up and left when it suited them, which was frustrating. “In those early days, we often waited for buses at different stops, sometimes for hours at a time, carrying our heavy suitcase full of samples with us,” Monica says. The wait time wasn’t a total waste, though, as they could crochet to kill time, and if they were lucky, the bus stop had a bench to sit on.

Occasionally they had to take a taxi when they were going to see Jeanne or Maria, for example, as there were no buses that went up to Beverly Hills or to Hancock Park. However, both clients always generously arranged for their drivers to take the young women home. Thankfully, it wasn’t long before the sisters were able to purchase their own car, a white, pre-loved ’65 Mustang for \$1,500.

“It had a gorgeous light-blue leather interior and was a very cool car, we thought,” says Monica. “We loved it and the freedom we finally had. We bought it from a car salesman nicknamed ‘Stan the Man,’ whom I had gotten to know while we were out dancing one night.”

Monica goes on to recount other new experiences in LA. “We also finally got a much-needed answering service. On the first day we had it connected, Maria and Jeanne both called us and left messages, and so did two other celebrity customers. The girl on the other end of the service who took down our messages might have wondered who we were and what we did to have so many famous people calling us in one day.”

The man who installed the service for them was quite chatty and started to talk with them when he was at their place. He asked if they knew a lot of people and if they went out a lot in the evenings. He probably thought two young Swedish girls in Beverly Hills had a very exciting social life. “Unfortunately, no,” they told him, and added that they mostly stayed home and worked in the evenings. He seemed to take pity on them and wondered if it would be okay for him to set Monica up on a date with his son. She agreed.

“So Mittan and I went on a double date with the son and his best friend, who was the younger brother of actress Michele Lee [who later became one of the big stars of the TV show *Knots Landing*],” Monica remembers. “We went to my date’s house first and had coffee with his parents, as it was their wedding anniversary, before going out on the actual date.

“After that first, short stop, we went to Michele’s house, which her brother was house-sitting for her when she was in Las Vegas for a month with her husband. There, we barbecued and hung out all evening and watched the sunset. Michele had just moved into the house with her husband James Farentino [of later *Dynasty* TV show fame], so it was not yet fully furnished, but it was a very nice place. We had a really fun evening with them, but we didn’t really hit it off romantically with either of them, so we never met up with them again.”

The Clothes

When they first started the business, the sisters bought all their yarn at retail price at either the Joseph Magnin department store or Super Yarn Mart. However, they had a big stroke of luck one day, about six months after going into business. Mittan was being driven home in a limo by a customer she'd had a meeting with at Saks. During the drive, the lady asked her where they got all their yarn. The woman was a bit surprised to hear that the duo were buying it all at full price. She then told Mittan that one of her best friends happened to own a yarn import company and recommended that Mittan contact him immediately to see if they could buy from him directly.

They called the man right away, of course, as this could potentially save them a lot of money. He asked them to come into his warehouse so they could tell him a bit more about their business and yarn needs. After an informal meeting, he gladly offered to let them buy from him directly at wholesale price. This was such a game-changer for them. The yarns were lovely and cost so much less than buying at full price. The only drawback was that they couldn't buy one ball of this color and one ball of another color—they had to buy a whole box of yarn if they wanted something. But that didn't bother the girls too much. The two of them ended up buying a lot of yarn from him over the years that they used extensively as it was of very high quality.

Besides ordering standalone pieces of clothing, Mittan and Monica had the opportunity to sell other types of items. They didn't only crochet pieces for their clients but also crocheted wide strips for a man who made and sold furs. Ben Moss of Moss Furs was a friend of Mrs. Golden and he sewed the strips into his fur coats, making them into a kind of stripe pattern with fur in between. It might have seemed a bit of an odd combination, fur mixed with knits, but it turned out quite cool and unique, the pair thought. They also made lots of long, wide crochet scarfs for the Pappagallo store that sold well and were very popular with the store's clientele. They were fun

and quick to make, and it helped them use up a lot of residual yarn, which was an added bonus.

The Home Silk Shop was where they used to go to buy buttons that they often used for closures. “That’s also where we saw singer Cher and her sister once, as well as competitive swimmer and actress Esther Williams,” Monica recalls. Running errands in Beverly Hills, they were bound to see famous people wherever they went. It was a common occurrence and something they got used to quickly.

The pair used mostly synthetic or mixed yarns and rarely used wool or cotton. Some yarns had a bit of shine or glitter in them, while others were a bit bouclé-like with different textures. They enjoyed using beautiful yarns in wonderful colors and making high-quality outfits with them. Mittan made a pantsuit in red, with a black thread in it, which they both thought was incredibly cool-looking. The drawback of making a pantsuit was that it was quite time-consuming to complete. However, the “mini” fashion was luckily at a peak during this time, so the girls decided to try making shorts too, as they could make them pretty quickly compared to pants. “I don’t think anyone had thought to make knit shorts for women before, at least that we were aware of. This new idea turned out to be a success, and we sold quite a few of them during these years,” says Monica.



Two of the girls’ suppliers.



Mittan (left), Monica (second from right), and their Swedish crochet assistants. The duo's large, home-made coffee table, made out of a door leaf, conveniently fit both yarn samples and refreshments.



Mittan (right), with two of their assistants, posing in a few new creations outside the sisters' Swall Drive apartment in Beverly Hills.



Crochet assistant Malou modeling a pink dress with a matching hat.

Monica continues, “We also did a lot of turtleneck-style dresses, tunics and tops. They were very flattering no matter a person’s size, and were often made with little or no sleeves. We didn’t do the turtleneck style until we got to California though, which was a bit ironic as it felt like a style that would have suited the colder climate of Sweden better. These pieces were made of a slightly heavier, silky yarn and were quite wide at the bottom, so the dress or tunic would swing out a little when you moved or turned around.”

The sisters had thought they had very cool outfits with them when they first came over, but they naturally developed their style more and more as time went on.

They became very inspired by the fashions that were popular in LA at the end of the ’60s and came up with new ideas all the time. There were hardly enough hours in the day to crochet all the outfit designs they came up with.

“Our first collection, however, which we had brought with us from Sweden, wasn’t really inspired by the current fashions of the late ’60s, though,” Mittan explains. “We sort of did our own thing at first, and we hardly ever sketched anything but mainly improvised as we went along, bouncing ideas off each other at the same time. A bit later on, we became bolder with our creations when we started crocheting pants and shorts—something quite new and unique, we thought.” It was a style that resonated with the duo and seemed to appeal to a lot of their clients as well, being modest yet sexy at the same time. Jeanne ordered quite a few of these pants in a variety of colors. She would wear them with a crocheted top that wrapped around the waist along with a belt and a fancy necklace.”

Unfortunately, though, the crochet pants weren’t a hit everywhere. Monica had booked a table for a big birthday dinner at the very popular Lawry’s to celebrate her twenty-first birthday, but they wouldn’t let her into the restaurant because she was wearing pants. Her fancy birthday outfit was one of the few pieces she had made for herself in a long time. She had worked so hard on it and was thrilled to finally get to wear it on this special evening. That she might be turned



Monica in her light blue pantsuit, which was not suitable for certain restaurants.

away from the restaurant she had been looking forward to going to for six months had not even occurred to her, and disappointment washed over her. So the whole group of friends who had gathered to celebrate Monica's big day quickly had to find another place to go where there wasn't a 'silly' dress code. A mini-dress that almost showed her bottom would have been fine apparently, but the very modest crochet pants were not.

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Mittan modeling one of the duo's dresses, along with a very brief design instruction.

As the months passed, Monica had less and less free time to make clothes for herself. “We worked almost around the clock sometimes to try to stay on top of all the orders, but we didn’t really have deadlines for the most part. We simply delivered the pieces as they were ready. It didn’t happen too often that a piece *had* to be ready by a certain time, and often the customers were perfectly okay with it taking some time, depending on how busy we were, before they received their outfits,” Monica recalls.

Monica and Mittan agree that they worked very well together, which made the long work hours easier. “We have very different personalities, but we luckily seemed to complement each other perfectly when it came to our business,” Mittan reflects. “We could always bounce design ideas off each other, and we both had a very strong work ethic. We’d sometimes even work in shifts when we had a lot of orders to complete, and because our crocheting technique was very similar, it was easy for us to take turns working on the same piece, so one of us could continue working while the other one slept.”

But soon even working long hours wasn’t enough. “After six months or so, we were so busy that we decided it might be beneficial to hire some help so we could take on even more orders and expand our business,” Monica explains. “Through my job at the delicatessen Konditori Scandinavia, we met a lot of other Swedish girls who were willing and able to help us out with crocheting, and at one point we had up to six girls working with us.”

Two sisters, Malou and Monica W., were a couple of the girls that worked for them during this time. Malou also had a job as a salesgirl at the high-end department store I. Magnin and was a fitting model for them as well. The salesgirls in more exclusive shops often modeled the clothes in the store to help sell them, so if, for example, a man came in and wanted a piece for his wife or girlfriend, he was asked what size she was, and then they would send over a girl of about the same size and height who could model the clothes for him so that he could choose the pieces that might best fit.

But the downside of working with these other girls was that it was much more fun for them to go out on a date in the evening than to sit at home and crochet with Mittan and Monica. “Deadlines, understandably, weren’t as much of a priority for them as they were for us. It was also difficult to take turns working on a piece with them,” Monica remembers. “Mittan and I could work on the same piece, but some of the girls would crochet more tightly and others more loosely, so it wasn’t possible to take turns with them. It was also a bit difficult to explain what we meant and how we wanted the clothes done, especially when a lot of the ideas were in our heads and not sketched out on paper.” Unfortunately, this solution didn’t last very long, and pretty soon it was back to just the two of them again.

Crocheting had so many advantages over knitting because the two could easily change the length of dresses, skirts, pants, and other pieces, especially the way Mittan and Monica made them. They crocheted from top to bottom, which was probably very unusual at that time, but much more practical. This ‘new way’ made it easy to change the length of a dress or a pair of trousers—if it was too long, they just undid it, if it was too short, they added more. The girls had come up with this solution before they came to the US when they needed to figure out the most efficient way to produce their designs.

“When we started with a piece, we usually had no description, no template, and rarely a sketch,” Monica explains. “We measured on ourselves, improvised a little, and checked it as we went along to make sure it seemed to be the right width, length, etc. Often we just sat in our bras and worked so we could easily try things on and adjust the pieces on the fly. The most important areas were under the arms and where it came together in the back. We needed to be sure it joined in the right way and went over the head—once you got that far and it fit, then all you had to do was crochet it down to the right length. We worked mostly on instinct and gut feeling—a process that wasn’t too easy to teach someone else. Thankfully we were very much in sync when it came to our designs.”

At Saks, they had their clothes on display for only about six months. The duo had to terminate their contract with the store because they simply didn't have enough time to make clothes for the store and its customers on top of their private customers. It was easier to work directly with the customers because then they didn't have to pay commission to the stores.

“That probably didn't happen to Saks very often, that a designer turned down an opportunity to showcase clothes in their store,” Mittan says. But the same decision had to be made for Pappagallo, Paraphernalia, and Carrie White. All four stores had helped them out tremendously in the beginning, and had given them so many valuable connections, but they worked almost exclusively with Jeanne and Maria now—these two clients kept the young women busy almost full-time with their orders—so there was really no need to produce clothes for the stores anymore. Word had spread about their creations, and clients were now finding Mittan and Monica on their own and placing orders directly with the pair.



A client's navy blue dress.

Baked Goods



At Konditori Scandinavia in Beverly Hills, Monica worked from seven in the morning until after the lunch rush was over. She had started working there at the same time as Monica W. (her future crochet assistant), and together the two of them would boil about a hundred eggs in the mornings and then set to work making Scandinavian open-faced sandwiches and other delicacies for the lunch crowd. Mittan also worked extra hours at Konditoriet from around noon to 2:00 p.m., when they were short-staffed.

A lot of famous people ate at the popular lunch spot when Monica worked there. She often saw music producer Quincy Jones and his Swedish wife Ulla come in for lunch. Actors Steve McQueen and Ali McGraw were also frequent customers. Monica would end up working there for about a year.

One evening in 1968, two young African American men came into Konditoriet, which was a little unusual as Beverly Hills was a very Caucasian neighborhood at that time. But what was even more unusual was when one of the guys asked Monica, “Do you have any gingerbread cookies?” in perfect Swedish!

SIDEBAR: Konditori Scandinavia was started by Swedish actress Maj-Britt Frati (née Håkansson), who moved to the US in 1955. She opened it in 1959 and it remained in business until 1983. Maj-Britt was married to Luciano Frati, a Swede/Italian who himself had run three very popular restaurants in Stockholm in the 1940s and '50s before moving to the US. He was the man who first introduced the pizza to the Swedes at his restaurant Tre Remmare in the 1950s, but the new dish did not become a hit until years later when reintroduced by someone else.



A Konditori Scandinavia company party at owner Maj-Britt Frati's house.

She didn't answer him right away, just looked back at him in complete surprise. He then started laughing, having probably expected her to react this way.

"Don't you have any gingerbread cookies?" he repeated again in Swedish, quickly followed by, "Don't you speak Swedish?"

"Oh, sorry! Of course I do, and of course we have them," Monica finally replied, before showing him the Swedish cookies in question.

It turned out this tall, dashing man was from Eritrea, and he looked just like Harry Belafonte, Monica thought. He had studied at Handels-högskolan, a well-known Swedish business school in Stockholm, for a few years, which was the reason his Swedish was so flawless.

His name was Abraham Kidane, and he and Monica became friends for a while. They would go out to eat occasionally or just get some coffee together. The two of them would sit in a restaurant and speak Swedish to each other in Beverly Hills, and Monica sometimes laughed at the odd looks they'd get occasionally when speaking this hard-to-identify-language with each other.

Monica's new friend was studying economics at UCLA on a scholarship from Eritrea. He had previously studied in Paris as well, so he was very well-educated already. "I guessed he was probably going to become a finance minister or something similar if, or when, he returned to his home country," she speculated at the time.

Abraham was surprised that the girls had not heard of a small town called Solvang, a Danish heritage town north of LA, so he suggested they take a trip there to check it out and brought along a friend. The four of them had a lovely day together, eating lunch and enjoying some Danish pastries for dessert while walking around exploring the quaint little town in the California sunshine.

"Abraham was over at our place one evening in June 1968 to join us in celebrating Robert 'Bobby' Kennedy's California primary election win. We were all in such a happy, excited mood that we decided to head down to the Ambassador Hotel to join the large, jubilant crowd that had gathered there. But just as we were about to leave the apartment, we heard the shocking news on the radio that Mr. Kennedy had been shot—a tragic end to what had started out as a fun, celebratory evening," Monica remembers sadly. "It was an evening I will never forget."

SIDEBAR: Dr. Abraham Kidane received his PhD in economics from UCLA. After teaching at several reputable US universities, he returned home to Eritrea in 1995 to work for the government and became the senior economic advisor to the government of Eritrea and the Ministry of National Development.



Above right: Mittan with Abraham's friend.

Below: The new friends during an excursion to Solvang—a Danish heritage town outside of LA.



The Big Break That Wasn't

In early 1968, Mittan and Monica were delightfully surprised to be contacted by the legendary *Harper's Bazaar* magazine, completely out of the blue. The magazine was planning to do a Scandinavian-themed editorial spread with the up-and-coming Swedish actress Pia Degermark. At only nineteen years of age, she had starred in the internationally acclaimed movie *Elvira Madigan* and even won a Best Actress award at the Cannes Film Festival in 1967. The magazine asked Mittan and Monica, on very short notice, to create a small collection of clothes for Pia that she could wear in the magazine spread. The photo shoot would take place in LA in a few days' time, when Pia would be coming over to the West Coast to do press for her movie.

“We were so excited about this opportunity—national exposure in one of the biggest magazines in the US—and we worked tirelessly, pretty much around the clock, to complete some amazing custom outfits for the actress to wear,” Monica remembers. The sisters were so happy when the clothes were finally finished and ready for the photo shoot. However, their joy was short-lived and quickly turned to disappointment when the magazine called again and said that, unfortunately, Pia didn't want to wear knit pieces when it was so hot outside. So the session was canceled at the last minute. Their nationwide “big break” disappeared almost as quickly as it had appeared.

Nightlife

While they worked hard during the daytime, Mittan and Monica also enjoyed the occasional night out. One evening, Maria Cole arranged for them to get into a private, members-only nightclub called The Factory that was a very popular place frequented by many celebrities. A member of the club had to invite a person or they couldn't get on "the list."

"It was very exclusive and hip, and such a fun place to go. We'd see so many celebrities hanging out there, talking, dancing, and drinking, that we'd only ever seen in movies or on TV before. That's where we met the lovely actress Barrie Chase one evening," Monica says.

"So what do you girls do when you go out to have fun in the evenings? Where do you go?" Barrie asked.

"We usually don't go out," the two sisters replied.

"Well, that will not do!" Barrie said with a laugh.

She did not seem to approve of that situation—two young Swedish girls with almost zero social life. Barrie got to work making sure they'd get into more places, such as the even more private club The Candy Store on Rodeo Drive. The place was run by Barrie's hairdresser ex-husband Gene Shacove, who operated it below his salon.

Barrie Chase

Born in 1933 in Kings Point, New York, Barrie studied ballet growing up. She gave up her plan to become a ballerina in New York, however, when she moved to Los Angeles to help support her mother, after her parents' divorce. During the early 1950s, Chase danced on live television programs such as *The Colgate Comedy Hour* and *The Chrysler Shower of Stars*. She was invited by the famous actor, dancer, and singer Fred Astaire to be his dancing partner on *An Evening with Fred Astaire* while she was working as an assistant choreographer at the movie studio Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Barrie made four appearances as Astaire's partner in his television specials between 1958-'68 and even dated widower Astaire for a while during this time. Barrie also worked in the chorus of many Hollywood musicals in the 1950s. She married famous hairstylist Gene Shakove in 1951, but the marriage lasted only a year. A marriage to Swedish actor Jan Malmström followed in 1966, but ended in divorce in '68.



Right: Mrs. Charles Livingston sets off good vibrations in a multi-colored afghan mini by Mitan & Moni for Carrie White Boutique.

Barrie immediately called Gene up to make sure the two girls got on the list.

“It wasn’t just called The Candy Store, though,” Mittan explains. “There really was a candy shop at the street level. When you went into the store, you would go up to an employee with a clipboard, and they’d have to check that you were on the list before they’d let you into the secret nightclub down below. That’s where we saw The Mamas & the Papas one evening as well as Diahann Carroll, who laughed so hard at a joke someone had told her one night, she fell over and landed in Monica’s lap. The Candy Store quickly became a regular spot for us when we went out and was always lots of fun.”

Barrie was incredibly sweet and helpful to Monica and Mittan right from the start. Not only did she improve their social life quite a bit, but she also arranged for a professional photo shoot featuring their clothes and offered to model. She even arranged for a photographer friend of hers to take the photos free of charge.



Contact sheets from the photo shoot organized by dancer and actress Barrie Chase to showcase the duo's designs.



The girls modeling some of their latest creations, together with Barrie Chase.



Barrie and the two sisters posing in a selection of crochet pieces.



Right: Stan's house in Beverly Hills. Rock Hudson's house is visible above.

Below: Stan by his car, posing for Monica's camera.



Above: Monica enjoying the view from Stan's house.

Barrie was so generous, and they were very grateful to her for all that she did for them.

The pair also frequented the exotic Luau restaurant on Rodeo Drive. It was a very popular spot, famous for its delicious drinks and pork tenderloins. “The decor made you feel like you were in Hawaii or Polynesia. That was our go-to place when we wanted to go out and celebrate something,” Monica says.

Mittan went out on the occasional date during this time as well. She dated the very talented and dashing



Ray Anthony in 1966.
Copyright © Alamy Images.

Ray Anthony, a band leader, trumpeter, songwriter, and actor, for a while after meeting him at The Factory one evening. He looked just like Cary Grant, Mittan thought, and she adored him. They had a great time together, but she felt the age difference between them was a bit too much, so the relationship fizzled out after a few months.

The Factory was also where Monica met ‘Stan the Man’ one evening. He reminded her of Vic Damone, a famous singer and band leader. Stan, who was now a car salesman, had actually been a musician himself, a trumpet player, before selling his instrument to Herb Alpert. He asked her for a date, and a few days later he picked her up in his shiny Cadillac, which even had a car phone in it—not a common sight in those days unless you were in a James Bond movie. Monica was amazed by the phone, having never seen one in a car before, and asked if she could call someone from it.

“Of course,” Stan replied.

She called Mittan and said, “Guess where I’m calling from?”

“A car,” Mittan replied, seemingly unsurprised (probably having heard the freeway noise in the background). Monica admits she had hoped for a more impressed reaction from her sister.

Stan lived in a very nice house high up in Beverly Hills, and he very generously said to Monica one day, “Here is the key to the house if you girls want to come up here sometime, or just lounge by the pool when I’m not here.” What an irresistible offer, Monica thought, and a change of scenery from working on their living room couch was always appreciated.

So the sisters went up there a few times to work and hang out by the pool. Stan lived next door to, and a bit below, Rock Hudson (a famous actor who was considered to be quite the heartthrob in the Golden Age of Hollywood), so he had a pretty good view of Rock’s house, and sometimes they’d see Rock come and go with various friends who visited him.

One evening they went out to a nightclub called The Daisy, which was also on Rodeo Drive. When they arrived, they ran into the charming Dino Martin (Dean and Jeanne’s son). He immediately came over to greet them and then stayed talking with them for a long while, offering to get them drinks and introducing them to his friends. He was a few years younger than they were and “always as nice as could be,” Monica says. He even drove Mittan home in his Lamborghini once.

“It was really surprising to us how much people helped us out, even if there wasn’t anything in it for them. That open and friendly trait feels like a very American quality and is something its residents should be very proud of,” Monica reflects. “It definitely made our time in California extra special. Everyone we came into contact with was so supportive and nice. I don’t think we had expected that before coming over to California. Swedes are, of course, friendly people as well but are usually a bit more reserved and prefer to keep to themselves more.

“Mittan is a bit more extroverted than I am, but I was quite shy at the time, so it really helped me that all the Americans we came in contact with were so outgoing. In retrospect, it really did feel like the “Golden Age of Hollywood,” and Beverly Hills at that time felt like a quaint, small town, at least from our outsider’s perspective.

We never felt like anyone was trying to take advantage of us, or had an ulterior motive for being nice, except for one single time,” Monica remembers.

Monica met a guy at the Luau one evening. He came up to her at the bar and seemed like a nice guy, so they chatted for a bit. He offered to drive her home a little later in the evening. She said yes without thinking anything of it, but when he started driving in a completely different direction, she started to get nervous. They eventually ended up down in Newport Beach instead of Beverly Hills. “I was so angry with him,” Monica remembers. “He probably had some ‘ideas,’ but he didn’t make a move, thankfully, and drove me home after my outburst at his ‘wrong turn.’ ”

The sisters came to the US when “flower power” was at its peak and the Vietnam War was going on. There was a strong hippie vibe all around, and it felt like marijuana was everywhere. Out of spite, someone had even planted marijuana by the police station, the girls were told. However, the two of them were very well-behaved and stayed away from all questionable situations as much as possible. Monica met some Swedish guys on the flight home in 1969 who asked if she had tried this drug or that drug. “No, nothing. I’m not interested,” she replied firmly.

“We were immigrants in another country and we didn’t want to do anything wrong,” she explains. “The US had received us with open arms, something we did not take for granted, and we didn’t want to do anything to jeopardize that. We were also raised quite strictly by our parents to take care of ourselves and be responsible, so it was deeply ingrained in us from an early age to behave and be a ‘model citizen’ at all times.”

As the months went by and California started to feel like home, they found a nice daily work routine. If they wanted to spice up their day, they’d occasionally go to their favorite local deli and have their go-to meal—hash browns with coffee, and then go back home and continue crocheting. That was how they spent most of their days in the first year.

The Wedding

October 21, 1968, was a day that changed things in a big way for both Monica and Mittan, both privately and professionally. They were invited to Monica W.'s wedding to Allan, an American police officer she'd met when he had pulled her over for speeding (she had managed to avoid getting a ticket, and Allan had ended up with her phone number and a date instead). This sunny Saturday afternoon wedding was where the girls met Bengt and Lany, two young Swedish men who were also living in the LA area at the time. Meeting Lany also turned out to have a big impact on the two sisters' business, more than compensating for the failed *Harper's Bazaar* opportunity.

“When Mittan spotted Bengt for the first time inside the church, she whispered to me, ‘I’m going to marry that man,’ and I probably gave her a look of amused disbelief. After the ceremony, we officially met them outside the church when they heard us speaking in Swedish



Monica, Lany, Barbro, Bengt and Mittan at Monica W. and Allan's wedding reception—mere hours after they'd first met.

and came up to us to say hello,” Monica recalls. “We introduced ourselves and then told them we didn’t know how to get to the ranch where the reception was being held, to which they replied, ‘Just follow us.’ ”

The reception was still a few hours away, so they stopped and had a drink on the way there. Mittan started talking to Bengt right away and learned he was going to school for industrial design in LA, while Monica sat and talked with Lany.

“My first impression of Lany was that he was a bit full of himself,” Monica says, “so I thought it would be fun to put him in his place, so to speak. I bragged as much as I possibly could [a very un-Monica thing to do, she admits], and I started telling him all about who we knew in Hollywood, about our business, what customers we had, etc., thinking that would impress him in a big way and get him off his high horse.”

Much to her surprise, though, after she was done talking, Lany casually replied, “Oh, I’ve met all those people. I run into Dean Martin at least once a week, and I’ve also met Elvis Presley.”

“I think my jaw must have hit the floor at that comment,” Monica says, looking back, “and my face must have reflected my shock at what he had just told me, which was the last thing I had expected him to say.”

He started laughing and went on to explain, “I work down at NBC Studios in Burbank as a page.*” Oh, how quickly the tables had turned—instead of Monica impressing him with her glamorous life and celebrity connections, Lany had ended up surprising her with his! So that was their comical first meeting, when they mostly just sat around bragging to each other.



A young Lany in his NBC page uniform.

**The NBC Page Program is a one-year paid fellowship at the NBCUniversal studios in NYC or California. During this time, pages gain exposure to various areas of the NBCUniversal portfolio and contribute to various teams and content assignments.*



Above: The newlyweds cutting the cake.

Right: Allan with Monica W. The bride is wearing a Mitan & Moni dress.



Above: Posing for a Swedish journalist's camera. He wrote a piece about their love story, and the unique way they met, for a Swedish magazine.

After this hilarious beginning, the young women started hanging out with Bengt and Lany quite a bit. Bengt was a night owl who went to school during the day and sat and drew cars at night, and Lany often worked very late into the night. At the end of their work sessions, the four of them would meet at Mittan and Monica's favorite deli at one in the morning, drink coffee and eat hash browns and talk about their day. Then they'd go home to sleep. This quickly became their new routine.

"We ran our crochet business all by ourselves, and the guys didn't get involved at all or have opinions on what we did, but we did end up getting a lot of new customers through Lany's job," Monica admits. "Without him and his connections, it would not have gone quite as well as it did, or at least as quickly, so he deserves a lot of credit for that. When we first met him, we were working a lot with Maria and Jeanne, and a few other 'big-time' clients, but meeting Lany took us to another level entirely."

NBC Studios

Lany mentioned the sisters' crochet business to people working down at NBC, and they became curious and wanted to see Mittan and Monica's clothes, so Lany invited Monica to the studio to show some pieces. He also wondered if she might want to work from there. "It could be a bit more fun than sitting at home in the evenings when Mittan is over at Bengt's place," he suggested. He didn't need to ask twice. To Monica, it was certainly a lot more appealing to be at a TV studio than sitting at home alone in the evenings.

She started going down there almost every evening when Lany was working. At first she sat in the actual studio where he was working, and where they were recording a show, but that quickly got a bit boring because there were retakes upon retakes for hours on end. So she found a nice spot in the hallway, at an old-timey school desk, to work instead. That's where she ended up meeting almost the entire cast of the sketch comedy show *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In*. The program was wildly popular at the time, and the stars of the show were quickly becoming big names in show business, if they weren't already (the show is the subject of a 2021 Netflix special). The girls from the show would come over to talk to Monica and ask about the clothes lying around her and spilling out of the little beat-up suitcase. Sometimes she even had to take off what she was wearing so they could try them on.

"That's how I first met the delightful actress Goldie Hawn, the legendary entertainer Sammy Davis Jr., the actor Arte Johnson and his lovely wife Gisela, and many others," Monica recalls. "Arte and Gisela even invited me and Lany over for dinner one evening, and I still vividly remember being served a drink at their place that I had never had before and hope to never be offered again—a German schnapps called RatzePutz. It was almost undrinkable, we thought, but nonetheless, we drank it up politely. The host couple had a unique shared hobby, needlepoint, which I thought was so sweet."

The Little Wonder Dog

Monica had always loved dogs and really wanted to have her own little companion, especially now that Mittan was spending a lot of time at Bengt’s place and she was home alone most of the time. Scouring the daily newspapers for a suitable dog, she finally found a little Yorkie for sale in the *L.A. Times* for only twenty dollars—perfect! The seller claimed the dog was a poodle/Yorkie mix, but she looked more like a Yorkie. Little Emma quickly became the light of Monica’s life and was the sweetest dog she’d ever known. “She also turned out to be a real people-magnet as well, so she also deserves a little credit for our success. She worked hard at charming everyone she met,” Monica laughs.

She started to bring Emma down to the studio with her, and shortly thereafter the actor Mickey Rooney came over to greet her little bundle of joy. “She was a great little ice-breaker and a perfect companion for an introvert like me,” Monica recalls.

A woman at the studio even offered her a thousand dollars for the dog. “Oh, she’s just the cutest dog I have ever seen!” the woman exclaimed to her. Monica kindly, but firmly, declined the offer. To her, Emma was priceless.

It was also thanks to Emma that she met the very handsome and talented singer Andy Williams (of *The Andy Williams Show*, which ran from 1962–71). He came over to greet her and Emma, and after they’d chatted for a little while, he asked her if she wanted to walk across the street and have a drink together after he was done taping his show. “I was very flattered by the invitation,” Monica says, “but as he was married at the time, and I was with Lany, I politely declined.”



Monica’s new puppy, Emma, in her new home.

Little Emma may have also enticed the amazing Ms. Diana Ross to come over one evening. Lany, who was a page on her TV special, and who was a very social and talkative person despite being a Swede, had told her about the duo's crochet clothes. So, one evening, Diana walked over to Monica, while carrying her cute little Maltese and teacup Yorkie in her arms. After they said hello, she asked Monica, "So, what can you do?"

"Anything," Monica replied, not quite believing *the* Diana Ross was talking to her.

Diana asked to see some of the girls' samples, so the two of them walked over to her dressing room, where she tried on a few of the creations Monica had with her. The singer then asked if she could order a few jumpsuits in different colors for an upcoming concert in Miami and wondered if the finished pieces could be delivered to her in Florida by Tuesday, which was only a few days away.

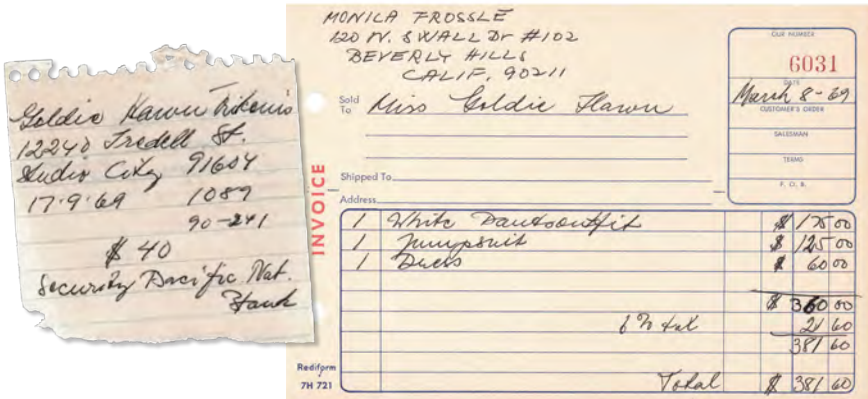
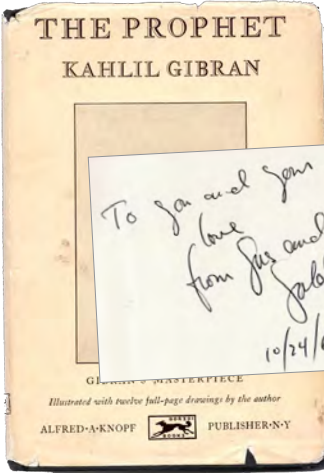
"Of course," Monica replied without hesitation. She and Mittan worked nonstop to make that deadline, barely even taking breaks to sleep. The clothes thankfully made it to the singer on time, which was a relief for the duo. A few days later they heard the very sad news that both of Diana's adorable dogs, which Monica had met in the hallway at NBC only a week or so earlier, had been poisoned in her Miami hotel room.

Diana Ross

Born in 1944 in Detroit, Michigan, Diana is an acclaimed American singer and actress. She rose to fame in the 1960s as the lead singer of The Supremes—one of Motown's most successful acts, and one of the world's best-selling female groups of all time. Ross has released twenty-five studio albums and countless singles and compilations that have sold more than one hundred million units worldwide. She was named "Female Entertainer of the Century" by *Billboard* in 1976. The magazine also ranked her the 30th "Greatest Hot 100 Artist of All Time." Ross portrayed the singer Billie Holiday in the film *Lady Sings the Blues* in '72—a role that won her a Golden Globe Award. Diana also starred in *Mahogany* and *The Wiz* in the '70s. She received the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012 and 2023 (the latter as a member of The Supremes), and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2016. Ross married her second husband, Arne Næss Jr., in 1986. The couple divorced in 2000 but Ross considers Næss to be the love of her life. She has five children, among them actress Tracee Ellis Ross.



Goldie Hawn at the Theatre Royal in London in 1970, in a Mitan & Moni coat and skirt. Copyright © Getty Images.



Top: Book inscription: "To you and your love from Gus and Goldie."
Above: One of Goldie's first Mitan & Moni orders.

One day Monica and Lany stopped by to say hello while passing by their house. Gus and Goldie opened the door wearing paint-splattered clothing and explained that they were busy painting all their interior window frames. They welcomed Monica and Lany into their kitchen, where they all sat down and had some lemonade. "Lany and I then offered to help them with their home improvement project, and the four of us ended up spending the rest of the afternoon painting windows together. She also showed me some cute items she had bought for their future house, and what her decorating plans were for it," Monica remembers.

Mittan in turn was very impressed by Gus Trikonis’s amazing artwork displayed around the apartment. “He was an artist as well as a producer and had an amazing eye for art,” she recalls.

Monica continues, “Another time Goldie had asked me to stop by their place, but she wasn’t back from the studio yet when I arrived, so Gus and I ended up talking in the kitchen for a long time about life, relationships, and other philosophical topics.”

Towards the end of their long conversation, he showed her a book called *The Prophet*. “You should read this,” he encouraged her. Apparently it was a favorite book of his that he often recommended to others. He gave her a copy and inscribed it, “To you and your love, from Gus and Goldie.” A little later on, the two of them got married and Goldie became an even bigger star.

“We unfortunately lost contact,” Monica says, “but Lany kept in touch with them both for a long time afterwards, I believe.”

Goldie Hawn

Goldie Hawn (1945–) is an American actress and producer. She rose to fame on the NBC sketch comedy show *Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-In*, which ran from 1968–70. Her role in the movie *Cactus Flower* in 1969 won her a Best Supporting Actress Academy Award as well as a Golden Globe Award. After *Laugh-In* ended, Goldie went on to star in countless hit films such as *Foul Play* (with Chevy Chase), *Seems Like Old Times*, and *Private Benjamin* (for which she was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actress). She continued starring in hit comedy movies throughout the ‘80s and ‘90s, such as *Overboard* (with Kurt Russell), *Bird on a Wire*, *Death Becomes Her* (with Meryl Streep and Bruce Willis), *Housesitter* (with Steve Martin), and *The First Wives Club* (with Diane Keaton and Bette Midler). She starred with Amy Schumer in *Snatched* in 2017, and in *The Christmas Chronicles* (2018) and *The Christmas Chronicles 2* (2020), she co-starred alongside her long-time partner Kurt Russell. Hawn is the mother of actors Oliver Hudson, Kate Hudson, and Wyatt Russell.

In 2003, she founded The Goldie Hawn Foundation/MindUP—a non-profit organization providing youth education programs to help kids improve their academic performance through life-enhancing strategies for well-being. The organization also teaches kids the skills and knowledge they need to regulate their stress and emotion, form positive relationships, and act with kindness and compassion.

Starstruck

With every step they took, it seemed, they gained another famous client. Monica will never forget the first time she met the one and only Sammy Davis Jr. This was the moment when her teenage dream unexpectedly turned into reality. “I was sitting on a chair outside the studio doors, as always,” she says. “It was probably half past two in the morning, and I was feeling more than a little bit tired when suddenly he appeared in front of me.”

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Crocheting,” she replied.

“What are you making?” he continued.

“Anything and everything,” she replied as casually as she could manage, while her heart was racing with excitement. She was suddenly feeling wide awake.

“Stay here. I’ll be back,” he told her. He smiled and sauntered away.

A little bit later, after the taping was finally done for the night, he came back out and invited her back to his dressing room to show him some of the sisters’ creations. Noticing her accent, he asked where she was from.

When she replied, “Sweden,” he sternly countered with, “Get out!”

“No, just kidding,” he added right afterward, when he saw her surprised, and a bit shocked, expression. (He had just gotten a divorce from another Swede, May Britt Wilkens.) He then went on to ask if he could order a few pieces from the sisters—and if any man could pull off a crochet outfit, it was him, Monica thought. He wanted to order two pants outfits, one in brown and one in black.

“What size are you?” she asked him.

“I’m about your size,” he replied half-jokingly with a glint in his eye. He thankfully had a pair of pants lying around that she could measure to get the size just right, as she didn’t trust herself to assume any pair of pants she made for herself would automatically fit him. “After all,” she says, “during this time, I was a little rounder in the hips area, and

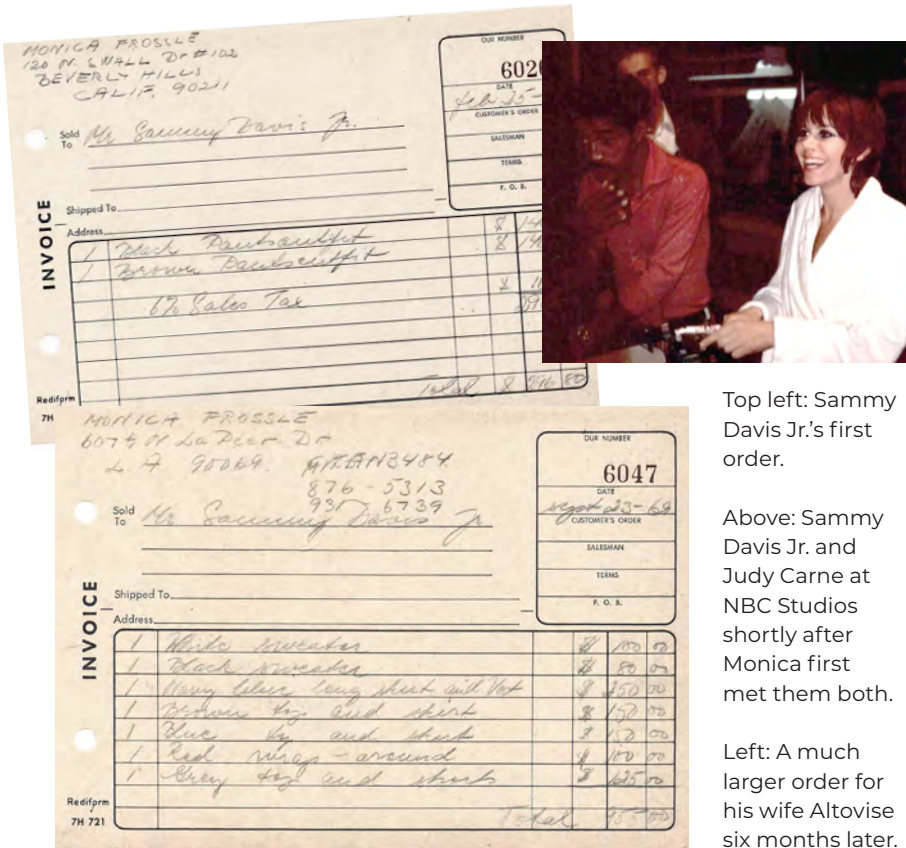
this charismatic man was not the slightest bit ‘round’ anywhere.

“Sammy had a radiant, magnetic quality about him that I’ve rarely encountered in another person before or since,” Monica recalls. “Even though I didn’t really feel that starstruck (which surprised even me), I couldn’t quite believe I was talking to him. Three years after my submission to the girls’ magazine competition, I was now standing in his dressing room in the middle of the night. It felt more than a little bit unreal that a small-town girl from Sweden was now talking to one of the biggest names in show business. At the end of our lovely chat, he gave me his address and phone number so we could deliver the order to him in person when it was ready.”

Monica and Mittan drove to Sammy’s amazing house in Bel-Air a few weeks later to drop off the finished pieces. When they got there, they noticed that there was a full commotion going on at his house. Butlers and maids in uniform appeared to be very busy preparing for something. One of them told the sisters that everyone was busy preparing for a movie premiere that Sammy was hosting at his house later that evening and that he wasn’t available to meet with them. So they left the package of clothes with one of the staff and drove home, a bit disappointed at not getting to see Sammy that day.

Sammy Davis Jr.

Sammy (1925–1990) was an American singer, dancer, actor, and comedian. He began his career in the *Will Mastin Trio* with his father Sammy Davis Sr. and they performed and toured nationally. In 1960, he appeared alongside his fellow ‘Rat Pack’ members Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra in the film *Ocean’s 11* and the three of them would go on to make several more movies together. The friends also frequently performed onstage in Las Vegas during the ‘60s and would even make surprise appearances in each other’s shows—delighting the audiences. Davis was also good friends with Elvis Presley in the late ‘60s and they were both the top acts in Las Vegas at the same time. His success in Las Vegas would garner him the nickname “Mister Show Business” and in 1964, Davis was the first African American to sing at the Copacabana nightclub in New York. While Davis’ career slowed in the late ‘60s, his biggest hit, “The Candy Man,” reached the top of the *Billboard* Hot 100 in 1972. He reunited with his friends Sinatra and Martin in the late ‘80s, and together they toured internationally with singer and actress Liza Minnelli before his death in 1990. In 2001, he was posthumously awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award.



Top left: Sammy Davis Jr.'s first order.

Above: Sammy Davis Jr. and Judy Carne at NBC Studios shortly after Monica first met them both.

Left: A much larger order for his wife Altovise six months later.

“However, we did get to meet Sammy again a little later when he rang and told us that a pair of the pants we’d made for him had been ruined in London. The dry cleaner there apparently didn’t know how to clean knits properly, as the pants had been sent back to the entertainer much too long, so I had to shorten them for him. I quietly thanked the dry cleaner for messing up the pants as I was more than happy to have an excuse to go back to his house,” Monica laughs. “And six months later, Sammy got in touch with us again and said his wife Altovise now also wanted to order some outfits from us. We happily went back over to his house to meet with them both. His wife was lovely, we thought, and we were very happy when she placed quite a substantial order with us. She wanted a few tops in blue, red, and brown; some matching skirts; and a pair of shorts. Sammy also ordered two more sweaters, one in black and one in brown.”

Mittan was one of those few lucky people in the world who actually got to meet Mr. Blue Eyes—the one and only Frank Sinatra—in person, several times. She remembers it like it was yesterday. “His eyes were so blue, they looked almost unreal, and he had a unique ability of making you feel like the only person in the room when he looked at you. He was also incredibly charming,” she recalls with a dreamy look in her eyes. Mittan even dated Jerry Burton, who was Mr. Sinatra’s lawyer at the time, for a while. A few times, after going out on dates, they ended up at late-night parties that Frank had invited Jerry to. “I’ve only ever had eye contact with him though,” Monica says a bit sadly. But that’s still more than most people in the world ever had a chance to experience with Mr. Sinatra.

Another lovely client of theirs was the lovely and talented Marlo Thomas. Her personal shopper Susan had seen the sisters’ clothes at Saks and got in touch with them. Marlo was, at the time, the star of the TV show *That Girl*, and they were very excited at the prospect of making clothes for her (for the younger readers, Marlo played Rachel’s mom on the TV show *Friends*). “One order quickly turned into many,” Mittan recalls, “and over time we ended up designing quite a lot of pieces for Marlo.”

One project for the actress turned out to be quite the challenge for Monica, though, and she wondered how on earth she was going to solve it. Ms. Thomas had bought a beige turtleneck top and was planning to wear a pair of orange pants with it. She wanted two orange knit pieces added onto the shoulders of the top, like little flaps, so that it looked like a military-style inspired top that would match her pants. “But our attitude was always to say yes to everything we were asked to do, and we loved a good challenge, so I got to work trying to make it look perfect. I sat up at night trying to figure out how to solve it,” Monica recalls. “Luckily, I finally figured out how to stitch these pieces onto her top, and how to make it look sleek and professional at the same time.”

They came to spend quite a lot of time at Marlo's house and would go there about once a week for a while. They'd sit by her pool, relax and crochet. Her co-star Ted Bessell was often there too, and they'd all hang out and chit-chat and drink lemonade in the sun. Sometimes her brother Tony was there as well. "Those were lovely California days," Monica remembers fondly.

Marlo's house wasn't visible from the road, so it was a very private residence. When they arrived, they had to ring the intercom to be buzzed in at the gate, then go up a driveway to a 'mini-castle' of sorts, a large, gray stone house that sat at an angle on the property. All the doors, floors and moldings were dark brown; the fabrics and upholstery were in blue, red, and white; and there were two large, yellow sofas in the living room. Two large bedrooms were used as walk-in closets and dressing rooms. It was an incredibly beautiful house, they thought. They had never seen anything like it before.

Marlo Thomas

Marlo Thomas, born in 1937, is an American actress, producer, author, and social activist. She was a guest star on several TV shows in the early 1960s before she became the star of the hit sitcom *That Girl* from '66-'71. She portrayed an up-and-coming actress who took different temporary jobs while pursuing her Broadway dreams. The show was one of the first to focus on a single, working woman who didn't live with her parents, and it paved the way for female roles on television. She has acted in many films, among them *Jenny*, for which she was nominated for a Golden Globe Award for 'New Star of the Year.' In recent years, she has been a popular guest star on TV shows such as *Friends* (as Rachel's mom), *Fraiser* (voice), *Ally McBeal*, *Law & Order*, and many more. She has received numerous awards for her acting, as well as a Grammy Award for her children's album *Marlo Thomas and Friends: Thanks & Giving All Year Long*.

Her father, Danny Thomas, founded the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in 1962 and Marlo now serves as their National Outreach Director. Marlo met her future husband, former day time TV talk show host Phil Donahue, when she was a guest on his show in 1977, and she has later declared that it was 'love at first sight.' In 2014, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.



Actress Marlo Thomas wearing a Mitan & Moni shawl in a scene from her TV show *That Girl*. Copyright © Getty Images.



We don't know what you call it but Marlo Thomas and

Left: Marlo Thomas in a Mitan & Moni piece.



Right: A very minimally detailed sketch of a pant design for Marlo.

MONICA FROSSLE
531 N NORWICH DR
WEST HOLLYWOOD
No. 9204 Dept.
Name Miss Marlo
Address

MONICA FROSSLE
531 N NORWICH DR
LOS ANGELES CALIF. 90048
No. 9210 Dept.
Name Marlo Thomas Date Aug 23 1970
Address To Susan Smith

MONICA FROSSLE
1027 SALOMA
SHERMAN OAK
No. 9218 Dept.
Name Miss Marlo
Address

MONICA FROSSLE
100 N SWALL DR
BEVERLY HILLS
CALIF
Sold To Miss Marlo
Shipped To
Address

INVOICE

QUAN.	DESCRIPTION	PRICE	AMOUNT
1	Orange cotton cuffs and suspenders plus collar		\$ 50.00
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
		Total	\$ 50.00
Amount due on presentation of this invoice			
Thank you			

Customer's Order No. Rediform 5H 22

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Marlo Thomas in a publicity shot for her TV show *That Girl* from April 1970, wearing a red pantsuit created by the sisters. Copyright © Getty Images.

“Sharon Tate also wore a few of our pieces, among them a short, striped dress in various colors, which ended up being photographed quite extensively outside of The Daisy one evening. Sharon had bought the dress from the Carrie White boutique though, so we didn’t get to try it on her ourselves unfortunately,” Mittan recalls. “The event was a wedding reception for Sharon and Roman Polanski in February 1968 (the couple had gotten married in London the month before) and the media branded it “the grooviest party of the month.” The reception was attended by a lot of big-name celebrities at the time, including Barbra Streisand, Elliot Gould, Faye Dunaway, Peggy Lipton, Lou Adler, and Patty Duke. Gossip columnist Dorothy Manners later stated that this one night alone ‘rocked’ Hollywood.

At a studio party, the sisters also met the very handsome Michael Landon, who at the time was one of the stars of the popular TV show *Bonanza* (and a few years later would star on the hit TV show *Little House on the Prairie*). Being introduced to him was very exciting for them, and a bit comical as well, since meeting him was what the girl who had won the girls’ magazine competition in Sweden had gotten to do. Now here they were, also realizing her dream for themselves, although there was no horse riding involved for them. Monica laughs at the memory. “His wife wasn’t too interested in our clothes, though, saying she had so many knits in her closet already.”

Sharon Tate

Sharon Tate Polanski (1943–1969) was an American actress and model. During the 1960s, she appeared in advertisements and had small roles in a few television shows before she began acting in films. She received positive reviews for her comedic and dramatic performances and was viewed as one of Hollywood’s most promising newcomers. She made her film debut in 1961 as an extra in *Barabbas* with Anthony Quinn, which was followed by several smaller parts until her starring role in the horror film *Eye of the Devil* in 1966. She was nominated for a Golden Globe for her first major role as Jennifer North in the 1967 film *Valley of the Dolls*. The same year, she also acted in the film *The Fearless Vampire Killers* which was directed by her future husband Roman Polanski. On August 9, 1969, Tate, who was eight-and-a-half months pregnant with her first child, was brutally murdered, along with four other people, by members of the Charles Manson family cult, in the home she shared with Polanski. Tate’s last completed film, *12+1*, was released posthumously in 1969.



Above and right: Sharon at The Daisy in February 1968.



Left: The author was delighted to come across this cute doll of Sharon Tate wearing a Mitan & Moni dress while searching the internet for images. The doll's outfit is created by Leanne Stones in Melbourne, Australia.

“We also had a few great, non-celebrity customers, like Mrs. Licht. She was married to Patty Duke’s lawyer and had found us through Saks,” Monica remembers. Mrs. Licht’s husband was also Dean and Jeanne Martin’s lawyer. One time when she came to see them at their new studio, she asked if she could bring a friend with her.

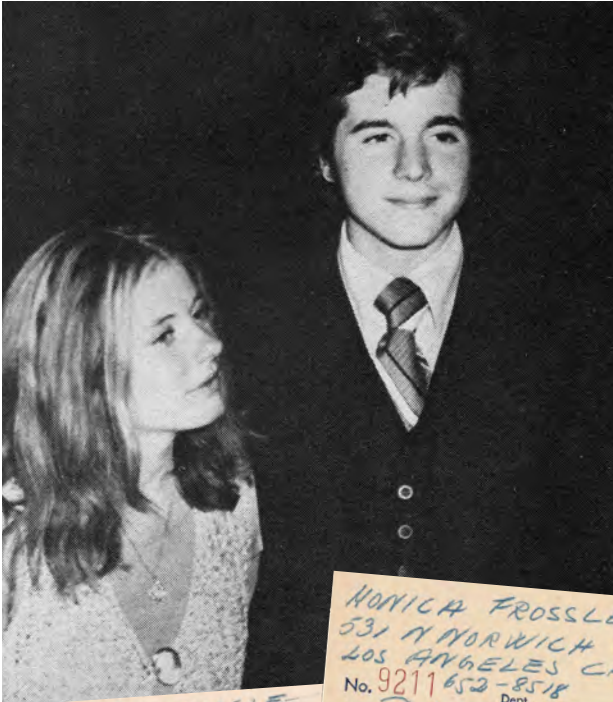
“Of course,” they replied. That friend turned out to be the very talented actress Ms. Patty Duke. She had won an Oscar at the age of sixteen for the movie *The Miracle Worker* and Patty had also been the star of the sitcom *The Patty Duke Show* from 1963–’66 when the girls met her.

“She was only two years older than I was, and the two of us ended up becoming very good friends,” Monica remembers. “The first thing Patty bought from us was a long, light-brown vest, which she wore when she accepted her Emmy Award in 1970, but we ended up making many more outfits for her over the years.”

Mrs. Licht, Patty, and Monica would go out to lunch occasionally, and Monica was often over at Patty’s apartment in a high-rise on Sunset Boulevard. When the two new friends were over at Monica’s place, Emma and Patty’s little Yorkie would love to play together in the small yard, and a little while later Patty would add a very large Great Dane to her dog family.

“Mrs. Licht was so happy that Monica and I were two of the very few people she’d met in California who could pronounce her last name properly, and maybe that’s partly why she decided to gift us each with a small pin that had been blessed by the pope,” Mittan recalls. Sadly, though, Monica lost hers when her apartment was broken into and robbed a few years later back in Malmö, Sweden. All of her jewelry and cherished sentimental items, which she had collected over the years, were gone forever after that unfortunate incident.

One special evening in January 1970, Patty was going to the Golden Globe Awards. She had been nominated for her role in the movie *Me, Natalie* in the category Best Motion Picture Actress in a Musical or Comedy. However, she had a bit of a dramatic dress emergency right before the big awards night when her mother couldn’t



Above: Mittan's pin from Mrs. Licht which was blessed by the Pope.

Right: Patty in a Mitan & Moni top with Desi Arnaz Jr.

MONICA FROSSE
531 N NORWICH DR
LOS ANGELES

No. 9205 Dept. _____
Name: *Patty Duke*

Address _____

SOLD BY		CASH	C. O. D.	CHARGE	ON ACCT.	MOSE. RETD.	PAID OUT
QUAN.	DESCRIPTION						
1	White Brown dress						
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							
11							
12							
13							
14							
15							
16							
17							
18							

Customer's Order No. _____

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MONICA FROSSE
531 N NORWICH DR
LOS ANGELES CALIF 90048

No. 9211 Dept. _____ Date: *Sept 9, 1970*

Name: *Patty Duke*

Address _____

SOLD BY		CASH	C. O. D.	CHARGE	ON ACCT.	MOSE. RETD.	PAID OUT
QUAN.	DESCRIPTION						
1	White evening gown						300 00
2	amount due						
3	earlier bill						100 00
4							
5							
6	Total						400 00
7							
8							
9							
10							
11	Amount due						
12	on presentation						
13	of this invoice						
14							
15							
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17							
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Customer's Order No. _____

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Patty Duke with her new Golden Globe for Best Actress in 1970, in Monica's light blue dress, shawl and feather boa. Copyright © Getty Images.

find anything to wear to the event. Patty kindly gave her mom the dress that she had been planning to wear, but then she had nothing to wear herself!

She called Monica in a slightly panicked state the night before the awards and asked for urgent help. She wondered about a dress she'd seen a picture of, the one Monica had made to wear to Mittan's wedding later that spring. Monica went over to Patty's house with the dress in question—a light blue floor-length stunner with a matching long shawl and feather boa—and quickly altered it to fit her. She shortened it a bit and ended up pretty much sewing it onto Patty so it would fit perfectly for her big night.

“It must have been a lucky dress because Patty won the Golden Globe,” Monica remembers. This dress is also one of the very few pieces from this time in their lives that Monica still has in her possession. Patty returned the dress to Monica after the big event so she could wear it to Mittan's wedding later that spring.

Patty Duke

Anna Marie “Patty” Duke (1946–2016) was an American TV and film actress, a mental health advocate, a sometime singer, and the author of three books. Patty began her acting career at the age of ten, and her breakthrough role came five years later when, at fifteen, she portrayed Helen Keller in the film *The Miracle Worker* (1962), a role she had first played on Broadway. The part won her an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress. The following year, she played the dual role of “identical cousins” Cathy and Patty Lane in her own TV series, *The Patty Duke Show* which ran from '63–'66. She then went on to play more mature roles, such as Neely O'Hara in the film *Valley of the Dolls* in 1967 (which also starred Sharon Tate). Patty also played the role of Natalie Miller in the film *Me, Natalie* in 1969 which earned her a Golden Globe Award for Best Actress – Motion Picture Comedy or Musical. In 1970, she returned to TV, starring in the made-for-TV movie, *My Sweet Charlie* which won Duke her first Emmy Award. Many more roles in film and TV followed until the year before her death. From 1985 to 1988, she served as the president of the Screen Actors Guild. star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2004. Patty had quite a turbulent personal life in her younger years. She was married four times, the shortest marriage lasting only 13 days. Her last marriage, however, to drill sergeant Michael Pearce lasted 30 years. She had three children of her own, two of whom are also actors, Sean and Mackenzie Astin. In 1987, Duke released her autobiography and in it, she revealed that she had been diagnosed with manic depression (bipolar disorder) in 1982. After receiving her diagnosis, she spent much of her time advocating for and educating, the public on mental health.

APR • 70



Actress Patty Duke outside Monica's house, modeling a long Mitan & Moni yellow and white skirt with a matching blouse.

APR • 70





Patty Duke accepting her Emmy Award in 1970 in a Mitan & Moni vest.
Copyright © Getty Images.

HONA FROSLE
607 1/2 N 1st St -
LOS ANGELES 90069

No. 9203 Dept. _____ Date 11-19 1969

Name *Connie Stevens*

Address _____

QUAN.	DESCRIPTION	PRICE	AMOUNT
1	Black Suit		150.00
1	Pink Dress		50.00
			200.00
<i>Total \$ 300.00</i>			
Amount due on presentation of this invoice			
<i>Thank You</i>			

Customer's Order No. _____ Rec'd by _____

Rediform 5H 32 KEEP THIS SLIP FOR REFERENCE



Connie Stevens, with actor and all-around entertainer Bob Hope, entertaining the US Troops, in a Mitan & Moni pink crochet skirt.

Shameless name-dropping alert by the very proud author: The girls also made custom clothes for Harry Warren's wife and daughter. Harry was a famous composer, and the first major American songwriter to write primarily for film. He co-wrote the timeless song *At Last* with Mack Gordon. Monica and Emma met jazz singer Nancy Wilson once, who asked her what she did for a living, and when Monica told her that they made custom crocheted clothes for private customers, Nancy replied, "Oh, it's lovely what you're doing, girls, but I've already passed the 'knits' phase. I'm more into sequins now."

They also made pieces for Lana Turner ("How incredibly beautiful she was!" they recall).

Lana Turner

Lana Turner (1921–1995) was one of the highest-paid actresses in Hollywood during the 1940s and was one of the film studio Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's (MGM) biggest stars. Lana had an eighteen-year contract with the studio and she earned them more than fifty million dollars during that time. Her career as an actress spanned more than half a century and Lana is often cited as an icon of Hollywood glamour and as a screen legend of classical Hollywood cinema.

The actress Rita Moreno bought some of their pieces at Pappagallo too, as did actress Stella Stevens. Connie Stevens, another well-known actress at the time, ordered some custom outfits from them, and when they went to her house to deliver them, they got to meet her daughters as well, who were very sweet, Monica recalls. Connie even wore one of their skirts when she and Bob Hope were entertaining the US troops at Andrews Air Force Base, but unfortunately you can see only a tiny bit of the pink skirt in the photo.

One time when they were both down at the studio, Jerry Lewis was there conducting an orchestra. Another time Ray Charles was there playing the piano and singing. Many of the sisters' memories from this time in their lives might have faded a bit over the decades, but these two big-time star moments vividly remain all these years later.

Connie Stevens

Connie (1938–) is an actor and singer who was born in NYC in. She relocated to LA with her father at the age of 15 and her career took off in 1957 when she made her film debut in *Young and Dangerous*, before releasing her debut album, *Concetta*, the following year. She appeared in a supporting role in the musical comedy *Rock-A-Bye Baby* (1958) opposite Jerry Lewis. Stevens continued to appear on screen throughout the 1970s and '80s, as well as performing. In 2009, she made her directorial debut with the feature film *Saving Grace B. Jones*, which she also wrote and produced, based partly on elements of her own childhood.

Rita Moreno

Rita Moreno (1931–) is a Puerto Rican actress, dancer, and singer. Her career spans over seven decades and she is considered to be one of the last remaining stars of the Golden Age of Hollywood. She is one of the few actresses to have an EGOT (an Emmy, a Grammy, an Oscar, and a Tony Award). In her breakout role, she played Anita in *West Side Story* in 1961. She received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2004, the Screen Actors Guild Life Achievement Award in 2013, and a Peabody Award in 2019. Her life was profiled in the documentary *Rita Moreno: Just a Girl Who Decided to Go for It* (2021).

Stella Stevens

Stella Stevens (1938–2023) was an American actress and model who began her acting career in the movie *Say One for Me* in 1959 which was produced by, and starred, Bing Crosby. The following year Stella won the 1960 Golden Globe Award for "New Star of the Year." She acted in over sixty films, and countless TV series during her long career. Stella was also a film producer, director, and writer.

Swedes Everywhere

During her time in California, Monica became good friends with another Swedish girl in the area, Siv Åberg, who had won the Miss Sweden title in 1964 (and had placed fourth in the Miss Universe Pageant that same year). They even stayed in touch for many years after Monica moved back to Sweden, and in 1980, when Monica returned to live in California for a short while with her husband and four kids, Siv came to visit them in Huntington Beach (south of Los Angeles). At that time she had moved on to working in real estate, Monica remembers. Siv ended up adopting a young Tibetan terrier that Monica owned named Playgirl (Monica's older dog Loppan's grown puppy) as Loppan and her puppy did not get along, and fought constantly, so Monica felt it was best for Playgirl to find another loving home.

“Marianne Ullberg was another Swede that we hung out with in California. She was a friend of Bengt's, and she had a small café on La Cienega Boulevard in LA called Röda Rummet [“The Red Room”], which was, as the name implied, painted completely in red. Her boyfriend (and future husband) was Joe Sample, an American keyboardist and composer, and he often hung out with us there too. He was trying to launch a funny cartoon at the time about a nun, but it never really took off,” Mittan recalls. Swedes residing in the LA area also used to have unofficial monthly meetings there. Mittan and Bengt often frequented the place as it was one of their favorite places to get coffee. The café also had amazing open-faced sandwiches that reminded them of Sweden.

“We were happy to get the chance to get the chance to make clothes for another fellow Swede—the actress Ann-Margret,” Mittan recounts. “We met her and her husband Roger Smith at Pappagallo one day when she was buying one of our white dresses that was displayed there. She also loved the new shorts style we were doing and bought a cute, bright yellow pair from us.” The actress later wore them with a long, crocheted tunic, in the same color and yarn that the duo had made to match,

Ann Margret

Ann-Margret Olsson (1941–) is a Swedish-American actress, singer, and dancer who goes by the name Ann-Margret professionally. Her singing and acting career began in 1961 and spans six decades. When she got her start, she was billed as a female version of Elvis Presley, with her sultry voice—the two actors were even co-stars in the movie *Viva Las Vegas* in 1964. The actress has had roles in many films during her long career, including *Bye Bye Birdie* (1963), *Carnal Knowledge* (1971), *The Train Robbers* (1973), *Newsies* (1992), *Grumpy Old Men* (1993), *Grumpier Old Men* (1995), *Any Given Sunday* (1999), *Taxi* (2004), *The Break-Up* (2006) and many more. She is a five-time Golden Globe winner and has been nominated for two Academy Awards, two Grammy Awards, a Screen Actors Guild Award, and six Emmy Awards. Ann won an Emmy for her guest appearance on *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* in 2010. She had a Top 20 hit song in 1961 and an album that climbed the charts in 1964. The singer also had a disco hit in 1979. Her gospel album from 2001 was critically acclaimed, and in 2004 she recorded an album of Christmas songs.



Actress Ann-Margret in a publicity shot for the movie *R.P.M.* in 1970 wearing a Mitan & Moni outfit. Credit: Columbia Pictures/Sony Pictures Entertainment.



Ann Margret at a party in New York City in May 1969, wearing a low cut, white Mitan & Moni crochet dress. Copyright © Getty Images.

SIDEBAR: Monica's late husband was a guest on Britt Eklands' Swedish TV talk show for women, *Bara Med Britt*, in the early 90s, where he talked about breast cancer and the importance of early detection.

in a promotional photo shoot for the movie *R.P.M* in 1970. The sisters met Ann Margret several more times after that, and she was always so kind and sweet to them.

“One evening, when we felt like we needed a little break and just wanted to get out of the apartment for a little bit, we went to the Beverly Wilshire Hotel to some coffee and ended up meeting Britt Ekland there [another Swedish actress and Bond girl],” Monica remembers. She was sitting by the bar, and when she heard us speaking in Swedish to each other, she turned around and said hello, in Swedish of course.”

She then went on to ask them, “So, what are you two girls doing here in California?” After they told her their story, she replied excitedly, “Oh, how interesting!” But she never ended up ordering anything from them.



Beverly Wilshire Hotel in Beverly Hills, California. Credit: Minnaert

Thriving Business

“We were both very grateful to have a thriving business, but in retrospect, we didn’t take advantage of all the opportunities as much as we could have,” Monica reflects. “There were probably a lot of missed opportunities that passed us by, both personal and professional. I wonder why we said no to certain events.

“I was also a bit naive,” she says. “For example, I didn’t understand when guys were interested in me, unless they were being very obvious about it, and maybe not even then.” Actress Cyd Charisse’s son Nico Jr., who was about twenty-five at the time and worked as an agent while going to law school, gave her his business card once when she met him at his mother’s house. Cyd was busy on the phone and asked him to entertain Monica until she was done, which he seemed happy to do. He was a very handsome and nice guy, she thought. At the end of their chat, he invited her to “stop by his office sometime,” and she thought to herself, “Why should I do that? I’m not going to be an actor.” It didn’t even occur to her that he might have been trying for a date.

Monica continues, “We probably could have had a much larger social circle than we did because everyone we encountered, both inside and outside of the entertainment industry, constantly invited us to places, clubs, and events. But if we didn’t spend most of our time crocheting, then we wouldn’t have had a business in the first place.”

During all these years, there was only one questionable situation with a missed payment. Judy Carne (an actress, comedian, ex-wife of Burt Reynolds, and cast member of *Laugh-In*) hadn’t paid a bill that the sisters had sent her. When they asked Judy about it, she said she hadn’t worn the dress that they had made for her and wanted to return it. But they had seen her wearing it on TV, so they asked Mr. Gordon (Lena’s father-in-law) for advice as he was a successful lawyer and would know what to do. He simply rang the actress up and requested that she pay the invoice, which she promptly did the following day.



Top: Mittan and Monica in 1969.
 Left: The outside of their new office.
 Above: A hard-to-spot Mittan in the duo's new studio/office.

After the little incident was cleared up, Judy even decided to order some more pieces from them, and the sisters were happy that there seemed to be no hard feelings involved. But the pair agreed it was definitely a good thing sometimes to have friends in high places who were willing to help out if need be.

As time passed, their success grew. “We entered a new phase in the business when we found our own little studio to rent. I also bought my beloved dog Emma, and a dark blue Volvo, around the



Mittan and Monica, getting into Monica's new, faulty Volvo in Palm Springs.

same time, so it was an eventful time in my life,” Monica recalls. She and Mittan would drive over to the studio together and sit there and work all day. It was great to have a place where they could see each other, now that they were living in different places after having met Bengt and Lany. It also felt more professional to have a place where they could meet with customers to discuss designs, choose yarn colors, and take their measurements. The office had a small pantry where they could fix lunch and have coffee together. The girls loved it there. They built a lot of open bookshelves around the office space, so they could see all the yarns easily, and moved the couch from their old apartment to the new space so they could have a comfortable place to sit and crochet.

“Unfortunately, my Volvo turned out to be quite the faulty car, despite being brand new, and would overheat constantly,” Monica recalls. The dealership had assured her that could not happen with this car, and yet it did, time and time again, she informed them. They finally took it in to fix some other minor problems, such as the car



Mittan and Bengt heading up to the Swall Drive apartment.

door not opening properly, but still kept insisting there was nothing wrong with the engine. She picked the car up after the minor repairs were completed, and before she even drove it out of the lot, the car overheated again, sending a light cloud of smoke into the air.

“I walked back inside and told them to come out to see it for themselves,” Monica says. “They opened the hood and one of the repairmen noticed the hose connecting the engine to the cooling system wasn’t attached properly and had therefore melted a bit, and so obviously wasn’t working as it should have. They apologized for not believing me and quickly fixed the hose, and all was finally well with the car.”

A New Look

Mittan and Monica were on what they called the “sandwich diet” when they first came to the US and spent most of their days and evenings sitting on the couch crocheting—not the most conducive lifestyle to a fit and healthy body, which most of the women they came into contact with in this area of California had. But they didn’t feel that cooking or exercise was a priority for them, as young entrepreneurs who were trying to get their business off the ground.

“Every moment that we didn’t spend designing and producing clothes was time wasted, we felt,” Monica says. “It wasn’t exactly the healthiest lifestyle—egg salad sandwiches with lots of mayonnaise were our favorite, followed by some coffee and a bit of chocolate as an afternoon treat. So, we were a bit out of shape and definitely curvier than the thin, beautiful actresses who were our clients.” Monica recalls struggling with this fact and admits she didn’t really like what she saw in the mirror sometimes. Eating, feeling healthy, and exercising were important to them both in theory, but their self-discipline was too poor at that time to do something about it. Work always came first.

Things changed big-time, however, when they met Lany and Bengt. “Almost overnight, we switched over to the ‘boyfriend’ diet,” Monica remembers. “I had always been good at, and enjoyed, cooking, and now I was cooking dinner for the four of us almost every evening, which resulted in a huge difference in our bodies very quickly.” In four months, she and Mittan lost twenty to twenty-five pounds each. It felt like the pounds just melted away, even though they didn’t start exercising any more than the small amount they were already managing on a daily basis. The weight loss wasn’t intentional, just a nice side effect of much healthier eating.

Monica made another drastic change to her appearance in the spring of 1969—this time intentionally. “I had worn my hair in a long style, with added extensions to give it more volume, for a very



Mittan and Bengt dropping off a newly bronzed Monica at LAX Airport.

long time, and I was so tired of my high-maintenance hair. So, one day I impulsively went into Carrie's salon and told them I wanted to do something completely different with my hair. I told the hairdresser that he could do whatever he wanted—every hairdresser's dream sentence, I can imagine," Monica laughs. "I was a bit nervous sitting in the chair, not daring to look in the mirror, or at the beautiful actress Katharine Ross who was sitting next to me getting her hair done at the same time. I had no idea what he was going to do, but he ended up cutting it very short, and I just loved it. I couldn't stop looking at myself in the store windows after I left the salon, not quite believing that it was me and that I could look that different!"

When Monica went home to Sweden in the summer of 1969, their dad didn't even recognize her. "On the way home, I had a layover at Gatwick Airport, outside of London, so I went into the restroom there to freshen up and change into a new outfit, before getting on the short flight to Sweden and seeing my parents again after more

than a year. I put on a short white skirt, a white lace blouse, high boots, and a big white hat from Saks, and I felt I looked quite chic and rested despite the long flight to London.

“In the arrivals terminal, I saw my dad and walked towards him, but he just walked right by me, which I found hilarious. Finally, I said to him as he was passing me by yet again, ‘Are you going to keep walking back and forth, or can we go home now?’ Dad looked quite stunned when he turned back around to face me, realizing it was his daughter who was speaking to him.”

However, going back to Sweden to visit her parents was not as easy as just booking a ticket home, unfortunately. Monica recalls that before she was allowed to leave the US, she had to go to the local IRS office to show her tax statements, otherwise she wouldn’t be allowed to leave the country.

“Before getting the ok to leave, you had to go there and prove that you had paid all the taxes you owed, and only then did the officials place a stamp in your passport showing that you could depart. I had been in the US for more than a year and a half by then, but I had no idea what to do in this situation as we hadn’t paid any taxes up to this point. It just hadn’t been on our radar that this was obviously something we should have been on top of. We had been too focused on getting the business going to worry about these practical aspects.

“Thankfully, though, we had filled a shoebox with all our receipts since the start of our business, and we had been meticulous about writing down everything we had done in the first year and a half. But how do we figure out how much we owe in taxes? we wondered. We had no idea.”

Bengt kindly offered to take on the tedious task of trying to figure it out for them, even though, being a student, he had never paid any taxes in the US either. He spent hours at their table one evening calculating everything for the sisters as best he could. He finally concluded that they owed quite a lot of money. They were in shock and almost didn’t dare go to an accountant or the IRS for a meeting. “We hadn’t put aside any extra money to cover such a high cost, and

now we would need to pay everything in one lump sum!” Monica remembers. She assumed the trip home was a no-go.

“Lany felt we needed to double-check the amount we owed though, and he thankfully had a contact, a good friend, who could help us out,” Monica recalls. “We went to the meeting with the guy and sat there anxiously waiting while he ran through all the numbers. He re-calculated everything for us and it went quite quickly, thankfully, as we had been very thorough with our receipts and invoices.” He concluded that they had to pay only a very small amount after all the expenses were deducted. What a huge relief—Monica could finally go home.

“I wasn’t really too eager to go back to Sweden at that time though, but I ‘had’ to go home because our parents had no idea we were living with our boyfriends,” Monica says. “They had wanted to come and visit us in the US over the summer, but we didn’t think that would be a good idea, as they would not have approved of our new living arrangements.”

Mittan was completely panicked at the thought of them visiting. “Please go home so they don’t come over here!” she pleaded with her sister.

Monica also realized she couldn’t go back to Sweden as pale as she was—no one would quite believe that she was living in sunny California looking as pale as she did. But as she spent most days indoors crocheting, she hadn’t really had an opportunity to get a nice glow. So the weekend before her flight back, the two sisters and their boyfriends headed out to Palm Springs for some sun and fun. When they returned after their weekend getaway, she finally felt tan enough to fly home.

“So, I went home for seven weeks during the summer so that our parents wouldn’t come over to California, but I wish I hadn’t gone back,” Monica remembers. “Those were seven very long weeks. Mittan had been right in the beginning when she’d told me that it would get better and that I would start to love California as she did because now I really missed my new life there.”

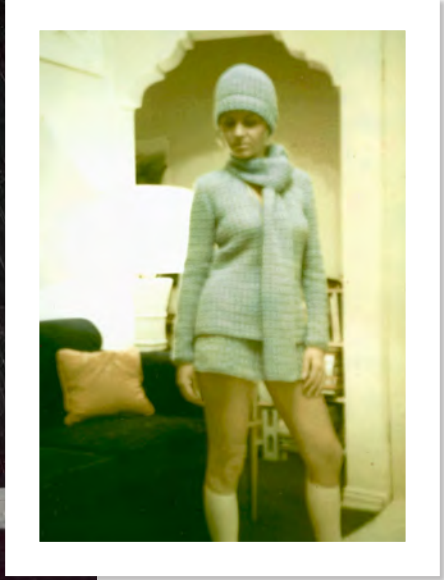


This page: Monica, with her new chic haircut, working on her tan in Palm Springs, California, before going back to Sweden for the summer.





Mittan modeling some new, both very short and very long, creations.



“I also missed the monumental, historic event that was the US moon landing, as well as almost two months of potentially fun times with our friends there. But that was also the summer when actress Sharon Tate was murdered by the Charles Manson family cult in early August, and that was one big reason I was relieved to be back in Sweden,” Monica admits.

Mittan adds, “After that terrifying event, everyone was so afraid to go out—it was a scary time to be there.”

When Monica was home in Sweden, she and her parents got to meet Mittan’s future in-laws, Bengt’s brother Patrik, and some of Bengt’s friends in Sweden for the first time—long before Mittan got a chance to meet them herself, even though she and Bengt were now engaged. The two sisters found this quite comical.



Monica at the airport in Sweden with her dad, Georg, before heading back to California, late August 1969.

Back in sunny California at the end of the summer, another NBC page invited Monica and Lany over for dinner. They got to his house around 5:00 p.m., ready to mingle and eat, but didn't end up eating dinner until nine because his girlfriend was holed up in the bathroom getting ready that whole time, apparently. Or maybe she was just taking a nap, Monica wonders now, looking back at the incident. It was a bit strange, they thought, as their stomachs growled from hunger and the hours passed. The page had to entertain them by himself for hours in the kitchen, offering them drink after drink, until she finally turned up and they could begin eating.

“So many unusual events like this happened to us in laid-back California that we felt would probably never have happened in ‘proper’ Sweden,” Monica muses, also remembering the other girlfriend they had met earlier who preferred to answer the door butt-naked. Life in California was much more fun and chill than anywhere they had ever been before, especially during those flower power days. The sisters quickly adapted to this new lifestyle and learned to just go with the flow.



Monica and her new puppy Shazam.

Couples Life

Besides hanging out with Mittan and Bengt, Lany and Monica would go up to Lake Arrowhead once in a while, as they usually knew someone who had a cabin up there that they could stay at. They'd go there to relax and to catch crayfish—a popular staple in the Swedish summertime diet. “We'd head out in our bathing suits late at night, armed with flashlights and a net to catch crayfish,” Monica remembers.

The whole operation had a bit of a clandestine vibe to it, but they had actually asked permission beforehand. A fishing license was required to go fishing, so the two of them just assumed the same applied in this case. They went into the license office and asked for a fishing license for crayfish. But it turned out they actually didn't need one to catch crayfish, as nobody, except crazy Swedes, did that. “Sure, go ahead,” the officials told them. So they went down to the lake in the evenings and sometimes caught over two hundred crayfish in only a few hours! Their friends back in Sweden would have been so jealous of them, they thought. A guy walked by one of these evenings and said to them, “Here's five dollars so you can go buy some food.” That was very kind of him, the couple thought, but they politely declined his offer. “He apparently thought we were fishing for crayfish because we couldn't afford to buy food,” Monica recalls, laughing.

They would also go up there during the wintertime to go snow racing. They found it amazing that only two hours from summer weather in Beverly Hills, they could be in a winter wonderland, racing around on snowmobiles. Monica's dogs, Emma, and her new Great Dane puppy, Shazam, also loved to play in the snow. One time Monica realized she didn't have a winter hat with her to keep warm in the snow, so she quickly crocheted herself a cute little red hat in the car on the way up to Lake Arrowhead.

They often went out to Ventura as well, to visit Monica W. and her husband Allan, and the four of them would spend the afternoons

riding horses together. Allan took care of a ranch up there that was on the famous entertainer Bob Hope’s land (Mr. Hope owned a lot of acreage from Los Angeles up to Santa Barbara) and Monica W. and Allan lived on the ranch full-time at that point. The stables held around fifty horses—some were their own, but the majority were housed there by others. There were always so many people out riding their horses, and as Monica loved horses and riding, she cherished these amazing moments in the presence of such beautiful animals. “We’d sometimes go riding there as often as a couple of times a month. You could go out into these huge paddocks and just ride as long as you wanted to,” Monica remembers fondly.



Monica and Lany out riding on the weekends in Ventura.

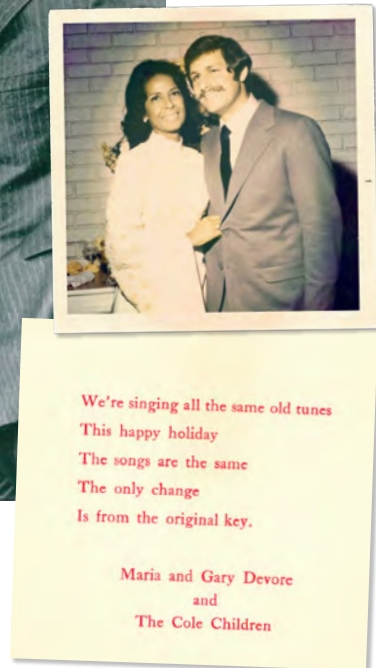


Monica and Lany enjoying some winter weather at Lake Arrowhead.



Above: Maria Cole and screenwriter Gary Devore in a photo from their engagement notice in 1969. Maria is wearing a Mitan & Moni cardigan and skirt.

Below:
The couple's
holiday card.



Monica, Mittan, and Bengt were honored to be invited to Maria Cole's wedding to screenwriter Gary Devore in the fall of 1969. There were probably around two hundred guests at the lavish event, which took place in Maria's garden. A large number of A-list stars were in attendance, but one in particular stuck out to Monica and Mittan: the famous British actor Gene Barry. He had a gorgeous black Rolls Royce with "GB" in gold on the side of it. Was he referencing himself, or his native country Great Britain, or both, the girls wondered at the time. Mittan also recalls how much she enjoyed sitting next to the very funny actor Ernest Borgnine at the dinner.



Lany and Monica at an NBC television studios party.



Enjoying another late night wrap party at NBC Studios.



Monica showing off some of Mitan & Moni's most popular designs.
Photographed by Lany in early 1970.



A long skirt and top in gold with a revealing back, later worn on the *Life With Linkletter* daytime TV show.





Monica modeling two quite different designs—a dark mini and a light maxi.





Monica with her beloved dog Emma.



Monica modeling her friend Patty Duke's Emmy Awards vest.



Monica modeling a skirt outside her and Lany's Norwich Drive house.





The End Is Near

In late '69, just off Rodeo Drive and Wilshire Boulevard, a small, cute store became available to rent. It was similar to Carrie White's salon and boutique, with a smaller storefront area on the first floor and then a second floor that the sisters could use as an office. The owner wanted \$5,000 up front for them to take over the lease, and then the monthly rent would be quite low, considering the location. They thought it was an incredible deal, so they brought Mrs. Golden down to see it, hoping to get her seal of approval, and she agreed that it was an amazing place and that it was a great idea for them to have their very own physical store.

"Unfortunately, though," Mittan says, "Bengt wanted us to move back to Sweden, where he had a job offer waiting, so the whole idea fell through. But just imagine what that store, and location, could have done for the visibility of our business."

Mittan and Bengt had gotten engaged in early 1969, and a little over a year later, in February 1970, they both left California for good. They went back to Sweden and started preparing for their wedding, which would take place on May 30.

"I felt completely miserable," Monica remembers. "Mittan had begged and pleaded for me to come over there, almost dragging me to California, and now she was the one to go back to Sweden for good. I absolutely loved living in California now, but I didn't want to stay there without my sister."

A few months later, Monica returned to Sweden with Lany for four weeks to attend the wedding festivities. But her dog Emma had tragically been killed in a car accident right before the trip, so she was feeling quite low despite the happy occasion. She remembers, "It was quite late at night, and we had decided to take the dogs for a short walk before going to bed. The two dogs were playing outside the house that Lany and I were renting then, and unfortunately Emma ended up on the actual street briefly.



Left: Mittan and Bengt's wedding day in Bjärred, Sweden. May, 1970.

Below: Monica at the wedding reception (wearing a dress and matching shawl fit for the Golden Globes!).



Left: Lany, Monica, Mrs. Golden, mom Inga-Maj and dad Georg outside of the Grand Hotel in Stockholm, Sweden, May, 1970, a few days before Mittan and Bengt's wedding.

Within seconds, she was hit by the only car we saw passing that night, at a very high speed on this otherwise quiet, residential street." It was a heartbreaking loss for Monica, who had loved her little dog with all her heart.

Mittan would have given almost anything to stay with her sister in California, as she loved living in the US just as much as Monica now did. But Bengt, who had graduated and officially

become a full-fledged car designer, had gotten a job at Volvo Cars in Gothenburg, Sweden. So the couple decided it would be best to move back to Sweden as this was an incredible career opportunity for someone just starting out in the field. Unfortunately, though, when they arrived back in Sweden, the job fell through. But then another great opportunity unexpectedly presented itself: Bengt was offered a job at the Ford Motor Company in Germany, but his dad didn't want him to move there. So they reluctantly remained in Sweden, with Bengt unemployed for the time being, while Mittan continued to work with her sister remotely. A short while later, Mittan also began her own academic journey—studying to become a dentist at Lunds University.

The young women reluctantly canceled their studio/office lease in early 1970 since Mittan was leaving the US and the shared workspace was no longer needed. Monica was living with Lany in LA at the time, but the couple ended up moving several times in a short period. They lived in each place for no more than a month or so, and they were miserable places, she thought. West Hollywood was not the most pleasant neighborhood back then. Later, the two of them rented a cute house down on Norwich Drive though, and Monica was happy to officially be back in lovely Beverly Hills again. But they didn't live there for very long either—no more than six months, unfortunately. The landlady canceled their lease because she wanted to give the place to someone she knew. It was quite a shame because it was the best place they'd been in for a while, and Monica liked it a lot. After that then they rented another house down in the Valley for a short time.

On top of the constant moving, Monica also had frequent problems with Lany, which didn't help the situation. "He could be quite jealous at times, and I felt that he might have had a problem with alcohol," Monica remembers. "The adventure with my sister that had started off so fabulously, and with so much potential and promise, was now slowly fizzling out."

National Exposure

In August 1970, however, Monica was offered an opportunity to promote their business. Staff at a daytime TV talk show on ABC called *Life with Linkletter* (hosted by Art Linkletter and his son Jack) contacted her and asked if she would like to appear on an episode to talk about the duo's business and showcase some of their crochet pieces. Monica felt quite nervous about the prospect of being interviewed live on national TV. Suddenly their clothes could potentially be seen by people watching the program from coast to coast.

Monica recalls, "I was told that the plan was to rehearse the interview once, before the taping, but when I went up to Art to introduce myself and say hello, he told me we wouldn't be rehearsing after all because he wanted the interview to feel 'fresh and spontaneous.' That didn't exactly ease my nerves! He did a small briefing with me, though, on how the interview would go, where we would sit, etc., and then how the three models would come out. Everything would be recorded continuously and without retakes, so if I messed up or flubbed a sentence, all the viewers would get to see it. The pressure was on to give a good impression to all these new potential customers across the country.

"Lany and I got there in the morning, and I was thankful for having slept surprisingly well the night before. I was feeling quite calm, but there were still some nervous butterflies flying around in my stomach. I spent some time with the models before the show, ensuring that everything was fitting them properly, and being busy helped keep my mind off the actual interview. I appreciated that the models they had chosen to wear our clothes were normal-sized—something I was sure women across the US could relate to a bit more easily than the slim Hollywood celebrities who were our usual clients. The actual interview went really well, I felt, and I was relieved and happy when Lany and I went back home. We'd only been down at the studio for about three hours in total, and it had all gone by in a bit of a blur."



Monica on the daytime TV show *Life with Linkletter*, sitting between Art Linkletter and his son Jack.

Black and white images by Lany Gustafsson.







Both images on this page: Archive © American Broadcasting Companies, Inc.
Below: Monica with Jack and Art Linkletter at the end of the segment.



Monica invited her friends Malou, Monica W., and Agneta to the house on Norwich Drive to eat crêpes and watch the show when it aired on August 25. The feature was five or six minutes long, and she was very happy and relieved after seeing it for the first time. “I enjoyed watching the segment and felt that I had held my own on TV,” Monica says. “My nervousness had not shone through, I thought.” A family friend from Sweden, who was married to a US Marine and had been living in Texas at the time, had seen Monica on the show. The friend immediately jumped on the phone to her parents in Sweden to tell them what she’d seen. She hadn’t known that Mittan and Monica had even been living in the US and making clothes up until that moment, so it must have been a bit of a shock for her to turn on her TV and see Monica there!

“The show didn’t really generate any new business for us though, but that didn’t matter so much as there was really no time to do any more work than we were already doing. I didn’t have a minute to spare to take on more customers, but it was a really fun experience,” Monica recalls.

After that professional highlight, though, as the months went by in the fall of 1970, Monica was feeling more and more sure that she also wanted to return home to Sweden. It was no fun being in California without her sister, and her relationship with Lany wasn’t going well. But the decision to leave wasn’t an easy one and took some time to turn into a reality. Monica reflects that, in retrospect, she wishes she had taken (Cyd’s son) Nico Jr.’s offer to come over to his office sometime. Who knows what that could have led to? Or that she had given Bruce Golden a chance, after his initial disinterest in her had suddenly transformed into what seemed like romantic feelings.

The Golden’s had shown their son some pictures from Mittan and Bengt’s wedding, which they had taken when they were in Sweden for the ceremony, and when Bruce had seen Monica in the photos, he apparently became quite eager to see her again, unbeknownst to her at the time. So, when Mrs. Golden called and asked Monica to come visit them in Newport Beach, she replied, “Sure, I’d be happy

to come see you.” But much to her surprise, when she got there, Mrs. Golden suddenly said, “Oh, I have to go play gin rummy with some friends now, but you can hang out with Bruce. He’ll take care of you and show you the boat.” And then she left!

Bruce and Monica had a lovely time, though, and he seemed much less shy than he had when they first met. He took her down to the dock first, to show her their new boat, and then he took her out for a nice, and somewhat flirty, dinner in the evening. When she told him she had decided to move back to Sweden, he said he could come visit her there.

After that unexpected day and evening, Bruce started calling her often, wanting to go out with her, even though she kept turning him down because she was technically still with Lany. But he was relentless. One time he even asked her, “Why don’t you come by the ski resort for a week before you go back to Sweden, so we can spend some time together?” (He was working there as a ski instructor for fun.) But she didn’t know how to tell Lany that she didn’t want a ticket back to Sweden, but instead one that went via a ski resort so she could visit another man, so she didn’t take Bruce up on his tempting invitation.

About a month before leaving the country, Monica got to experience one more earthquake. It happened about five-thirty in the morning. “We were living in the Valley at that time, near the epicenter,” Monica remembers. “The Vietnam War was still going on, so the first thought I had was that a hand grenade had come flying in. You didn’t understand anything when you were awoken so suddenly in the darkness. All the kitchen doors had opened up and things tumbled out in seconds. We threw our clothes on and rushed out as fast as we could. The instinct was just to escape. Every single car and business alarm went off, and some fire hydrants burst in the street. The day after the event, the guy who had shown interest in buying my Volvo called me up and gave me an offer on it. It felt like a sign. So, I sold it, and that was that—the final decision had been made. I went back in March 1971, after three-and-a-half amazing years in California.”



Left: Monica and Lany at NBC Studios in Burbank, California, late 1970.

Below: Monica and Shazam posing in front of comedian and actor Red Skelton's Rolls Royce parked outside NBC Studios.

The Swedish Hollywood Club
 HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA
 This is to certify that
MONICA PRÖSSLE
 is a registered member of this
 organization and is entitled to
 all Privileges.
Sven Håkingsbult
 Treasurer
 19 71





Mittan modeling a few new pieces back in Sweden.



Vilken Hollywood-karriär hon gjort, svenska Moni!

Det var Sammy Davis som upptäckte Örebroflickan Moni! Nu säljer hon sina handvirkade plagg till de flesta Hollywood-stjärnorna! Här får ni veta hur hon lyckats göra en sådan karriär — och på sid. 54-55 får ni virkbeskrivningen på en dräkt som bl.a. Lana Turner köpt av Moni!



● Det hände i en TV-studio.

Sammy Davis kom skåntrande i en korridor, passerade en flicka som satt där och handarbetade intensivt, blev nyfiken och undrade vad hon höll på med.

När han fick veta att resultatet skulle bli ett par virkade långbyxor ländes det verkliga intresset hos Sammy. En timme senare i hans lög — efter att han klarat av sitt gästspel i en Dean Martin-show — beställde han två kompletta scendresser av flickan. Handvirkade från kragen till fotleden!

Flickan var svenska, heter Moni Frösle och kommer från Örebro!

Hennes och hennes syster Mitans företag "Mitan och Moni of Sweden" är nu ett välkänt begrepp i Hollywood.

Hur kom de på den extrema idén att försöka lansera virkat bland film- och TV-artister i Hollywood?

Moni berättar och på henne låter det som om alltsammans var hur enkelt och naturligt som helst:

— Mitan bodde i Los Angeles ett år och när mamma skickade över ett par virkade tröjor kunde Mitan inte undgå att märka vilken sensation de gjorde här! Amerikanerna är

hemskt fuliga och tafatta när det gäller handgjort — de känner knappt ens till att det g å r att lägga upp eller ner en kjol...

Systarna Frösle beslöt att ta en chans — på vinst och förlust virkade de upp en kollektion på trettio plagg och stegade upp till modetidningen Vogue i New York.

— De nappade direkt och spåret ledde vidare till Sak's exklusiva varuhus på Feme Avenyn plus en del privata kunder, berättar Moni.

VÅN MED DEAN MARTIN

Nu är Moni ensam i Hollywood, sedan mamma farit hem och Mitan gift sig med Bengt Nestell, designer med topputbildning i Los Angeles. De bor i Malmö.

Moni har byggt upp en stadig kundkrets med namn som Goldie Haw — som hon också är personlig vän med, Dean Martin och Jeani Martin, Maria Cole — det är Nat King Coles änka och hon har minst sextio (!) virkade plagg i sin garderob, Ursula Anders, Diane Ross som en gång fick tre dressler levererade på två och ett halvt dygn för en TV-show, Cyd Charisse, Sammy Davis, Lana Turner etc.

Hur klarar Moni sig utan sin syster?

När hon får in för många

beställningar på en gång aktiverar hon Mitan hemma i Sverige.

— Det fungerar bra även om jag saknar möjligheterna att prata fram nya idéer och knep med henne. Det var nog lättare att förnya sig när vi var två. Vi kom på sådana där saker som att virka alla plagg uppifrån — på det sättet kunde vi vänta med att bestämma längden till sist när vi visste hur plagget tog sig ut!

Nyligen presenterades Moni själv och en kollektion virkade plagg i amerikansk TV. Medan tre mannekänger gled förbi i rutan berättade Moni om arbetstekniken som ligger bakom varje plagg.

— Virkat ger ju ofta en spännande aning av att vara genomskinligt på ett litet syndfyllt sätt och det är något som fascinerar amerikansk publik. Att ha en känsla av att man kanske ser mer skinn än man borde, tycker de om!

EXKLUSIVA PRISER

En byxdress med "Moni och Mitan" på etiketten kostar ungefär 200 dollar mättbestäld. Garnet kostar mellan 20 och 60 dollar.

— Vi vet att vi är dyra, säger Moni. Vi bestämde oss från början för att vara det. Sådant här arbete kan man

aldrig utveckla till någon massproduktion och därför måste vi sälja exklusivt om vi ska ha en chans att orka fortsätta. Ofta är det ett monotont arbete — särskilt om man får in sådana beställningar som den från Diane Ross för ett tag sedan.

— Hon fick helt plötsligt för sig att hon ville ha tre likadana dressar i olika färger för en TV-show. Vi fick knappt tre dagar på oss — men det är klart att vi klarade det! Vi satt uppe dag och natt tills vi blev färdiga.

Moni levererar plaggen själv till sina kunder för att kunna göra en slutprovning och försäkra sig om att kunden är nöjd.

Hon Inssar litet när hon berättar om hur det är att svänga upp med Volvo framför exempelvis Dean Martins villa i Beverly Hills.

— Där står ju ofta massor av folk med kamerorna i högsta hugg och de kastar sig över vem som än har ett ärende till huset! Det måste finnas massor av filmfantaster som sitter och grubblar över vilken film jag varit med i... innan de kommer underfund med att jag inte alls är känd!

Men det är hon ju. Och för en mycket exklusiv publik. ■

AV KRISTINA ÖSTRÖM

An article about the sisters' success in the Swedish women's magazine *Svensk Damtidning*. No. 8, 18-24 February, 1971.



Virkat för er och Hollywoods stjärnor

mellanrum, det översta vid hälsringningens slut och det nedersta ca 10 cm från nederkanten. Knappshålen görs genom att man virkar 3 lm och hoppar över 2 lm. På v tillbaka virkar man 2 fm omkr de 3 lm. Virka sammanlagt 6 v fm. Tag av garnet.

KJOLEN

Börja upptill. Lägg med dubbelt garn upp 120 (132) lm elastiskt, slut till en ring med 1 sm. Byt till enkelt garn, X—X upprepas.

V. 1. 3 lm, 3 st i samma m, som sista sm X hoppa över 2 lm, 2 st i samma lm (= en 2-stgr), hoppa över 2 lm, 4 st i samma lm (= en 4-stgr) X sluta med att hoppa över 2 lm, 2 st i samma lm, hoppa över 2 lm, 1 sm i 3:e lm, 1 sm i nästa st, 1 sm i nästa mellanrum (= 20 (22) 2-stgr och 20 (22) 4-stgr.

V. 2. 3 lm, 3 st i samma mellanrum, som sista sm X 2 st i nästa 2-stgr (lag ner i mellanrummet), 4 st i nästa 4-stgr (lag ner i mittersta mellanrummet) X, sluta med 2 st i sista 2-stgr, 1 sm i 3:e lm, 1 sm i nästa st, 1 sm i nästa mellanrum.

UPPREPA V 2.

På 4:e v börjar man öka i sidorna. 1:A ÖKNINGSV. Virka tills 10 (11) 4-stgr är gjorda X 1 st i mellanrummet till höger om nästa 2-stgr, 2 st i 2-stgr, 1 st i mellanrummet till vänster om 2-stgr X, virka tills ytterligare 10 (11) 4-stgr är gjorda, virka X—X, avsluta som förut.

2:A ÖKNINGSV. Virka 2 st i var och en av de ökade st.

3:E ÖKNINGSV. Virka 3 st i 2-stgr mellan de ökade st.

4:E ÖKNINGSV. Virka 4 st i gruppen av 3 st med nertag i mittersta st (= 22 (24) 2-stgr och 22 (24) 4-stgr).

Virka 7 v utan ökn. På nästa v gör man ökn. genom att virka en 6-stgr i var 4:e 4-stgr = sex 6-stgr över v. (På storl 36—38 blir det på ett ställe en 4-stgr mellan 6-stgr i stället för tre 4-stgr). Virka 7 v med dessa ökade grupper. Gör på nästa v ökn. genom att virka 6-stgr i de 4-stgr, som ligger mitt emellan de tidigare ökn. = tolv 6-stgr över v. Virka 7 v med dessa ökade grupper. Öka på nästa v genom att göra resterande 4-stgr till 6-stgr. Virka rakt tills arb. är 60 (62) cm för kort kjol och 85 (90) cm för lång kjol eller önskad längd. Tag av garnet och fäst.

Linningen: Virka från räts 1 fm i varje upplagd lm, fortsätt att virka runt i fm om båda maskb tills linningen är 2½ cm. Tag av garnet, fäst. Tränsa fast ett resårband på insidan.

MONA och MITAN är två svenska systrar som designar och virkar roliga kläder åt Hollywoods stjärnor.

På sidan 9 kan ni läsa om deras framgångar. Den här dräkten som ni själva kan virka har bl. a. Marlo Thomas (TV:s Flicka med Det), Lana Turner, Barrie Chase och Dianne Warwick köpt. Originaldräkten **SOM VI LOTTAR UT (st. 36)** är gjord i ett amerikanskt sammetsgarn som inte finns här. Vi föreslår i stället ett mer lättarbetat svenskt garn, Marks Linoflam, som finns i många färger, bl. a. rost, orange, syren, nougat. Länga kjolen t. h. är virkad just i det garnet.

Vinn originalmodellen!

KUPONG PÅ SIDAN 66.

"Crochet clothes for you and Hollywood's stars. Win the original model!" Swedish women's magazine competition and crochet skirt suit instructions in *Svensk Damtidning*. No. 8, 18-24 February, 1971.



Mittan and Monica in 1971, working on new creations back in Malmö, Sweden, before dental school (for Mittan), steady jobs, and family life became their main focus.



Left and below: Crochet designs and instructions created for the Swedish women's magazine *Hemmet's Journal*, no. 45, 26/10-1/11, 1972.



Left: Mittan modeling a new piece for a Swedish women's magazine.

Svenskor som lyckats i USA

Tacka virknålen för det!

Left: "Swedish women who've succeeded in the USA have the crochet hook to thank for it!"

Below: "Swedish crochet designs impressed Americans and gave the sisters round-the-clock work!"



Svensk virkningskonst knockade amerikanskor. Gav systrar dygnet-runt-jobb!

Först lämnade Britt-Marie Frösle Örebro för Kalifornien. I väntan på system Monica hade hon fritidsproblem. Då började hon virka. Monica kom och hjälpte till. Tillsammans traskade de upp till en stor modetidning, fick reklam genom reportage och en lavinartad beställning som följde. När orderlapparna strömmade in som bäst fick Britt-Marie och Monica virka dygnet runt – i skift.

Text: MONNICA SÖDERBERG/YVONNE JOHNSON

Foto: SIXTEN SVENSSON samt MITAN NESTELLS privata bilder

Örebro flickorna Britt-Marie och Monica Frösle. Under den största ruschen efter deras virkade plagg fick systrarna arbeta med sina nålar och garnet dygnet runt – i skift! En utveckling de aldrig vågat drömma om. Och allt detta bara därför att Britt-Marie, Mitans kallad, hade fritidsproblem. I brist på annat satte hon igång med virkning – en syssla som fick lavinartade konsekvenser.

Mitan kom först till Kalifornien. I väntan på att Monica skulle komma efter virkade Mitans. När systrarna strålade samman fortsatte de. Tills de tyckte att de hade alltför mycket av handgjorda plagg.

Ryktet går

Eftersom systrarna Frösle är orädda tog de Gud i hägen, varandra i handen och de virkade plaggen i en bag och knallade upp på modetidningen *Vogues* redaktion för att visa vad de kunde. Redaktionens medlemmar blev eld och lågor. Följden blev ett stort reportage om »Mitan och Moni of Sweden» och deras händighet. En amerikansk boutique-kedja såg resultatet i tidningen, hörde av sig och gjorde en massbeställning. Därmed var karusellen igång.

Goles fru dit. Hon såg vad vi gjort och blev så förtjust att hon på stående fot beställde fler virkade kläder av oss, berättar Mitans. Genom henne spreds ryktet snabbt om våra alster.

En lång rad av kändisar dök upp. Plötsligt skulle alla bära Mitans och Monis kläder. Nancy Sinatra, Lana Turner, Ursula Anders, Dean Martin och hans fru, Berry Chase – en gång gift med Janne Malmsjö – Sharon Tate och Christine Kaufmann, f. d. gift Tony Curtis.

Scenkostym till Sammy Davis Jr.

– Vi virkade till filmer och TV-shower. Till slut fick vi öppna kontor på NBC, TV-bolaget i Hollywood. Det var där vi råkade på Sammy Davis Jr. Han stirrade förundrat på vårt knäpande och frågade slutligen nyfiskt vad vi sysslade med. Två minuter senare hade han beställt en scenkostym!

Mitan och Moni har aldrig haft så jäktigt och jobbigt förr. Ett tag använde de ett par amerikanskor till hjälp, men de bara tappade maskor och gjorde fel, så systrarna fick fortsätta ensamma.

Det tog en dag för Mitans och Moni att virka en dräkt. Som



Once back in Sweden, Monica soon got a job at a hospital in the city of Malmö in southern Sweden—once again in the radiology department. She had decided to move there instead of Örebro to be closer to her sister. She would walk by the SAS airline ticket office every day for six months on her way to work and wonder if she should buy a ticket to go back to California. But with each passing day, the urge subsided just a tiny bit, and she slowly but surely realized her new life was now in Sweden. Shortly thereafter, she met her future husband Björn, a doctor at the hospital where she worked, and two years to the day after she appeared on the *Life with Linkletter* show, their first child, Jenny, was born. Together they went on to have four more children, Johanna, Jesper, Jacob (in the 1970s), and Joy (in the 1980s), before Björn passed away in 2002. Mittan and Bengt also became parents shortly after moving back to Sweden in the early 1970s, to Pontus, Oscar, and Celia.

This dream experience, of two young Swedish women starting a successful business almost overnight, could never have become a reality in Sweden, the sisters agree. “In the US, some people had a lot of money, especially where we lived in Beverly Hills, where none of our clients really cared about the cost of the outfits. It was also a brilliant and gutsy move by Mittan to decide to start at the top,” Monica says.

“But if Eleanore Phillips at *Vogue* hadn’t liked our clothes, then nothing probably would ever have come of it,” Mittan adds. “She was the one who opened all the doors for us, and whose encouragement and help that fortuitous day allowed us to have this incredible, unforgettable, and unique experience together.”

“The memories and the amazing people we met in California during these years are ones we’ll cherish forever,” Monica and Mittan conclude.

“We did get to see Diana Ross once again, in the fall of 1973,” Monica remembers. “Mittan had contacted her manager when Diana was doing a show in Gothenburg, but how she got ahold of that number, I’ll never know. But my sister is very resourceful. We told him what it was regarding and he said he’d get back to us. He called us back a little later and said Miss Ross would love to see us and that she also wanted to see our new pieces, so we packed up two bags of new outfits to show her.”

Monica and Mittan, and their husbands Björn and Bengt, took the ferry from Malmö, Sweden, to Copenhagen, Denmark, where Diana’s next show was taking place. A limo was sent to take them from the ferry to the venue, and the four of them got to see the singer’s entire show for free. “We were supposed to meet her during the intermission, but there were delays in the show, so that didn’t happen,” Monica remembers. “But then her manager asked us to come back to the stage entrance after the show instead. When we got there, there were probably around fifty journalists waiting for her. The manager appeared a few minutes later and led me and Mittan inside to see her.”

“It’s so great to see you girls!” Diana exclaimed as they walked into her dressing room. “Well, you might know what I’ve been up to lately. I have three kids now. Can you believe it? But what have you two been up to?” she asked. After they filled her in on their new lives in Sweden, she went on to say, “Let me see what you have brought with you.” So they showed her the new pieces, and she loved a long coat that Monica had made out of leftover yarn in many different colors—red, orange, yellow, and purple—and wanted to buy it on the spot. She then asked about the price.

“Four hundred dollars,” Monica said a bit hesitantly, thinking that might be too much.

“No problem,” Diana replied, “but I don’t have any money with me here at the concert venue, so could you both come back to the hotel with me so I can pay you?” Unfortunately, Monica had to return home to feed her little baby Jenny, but Mittan and Bengt happily went with Diana and had a drink with her back at her hotel.

Below: Björn at 'South House' in Tyringham, visiting Maria and Gary.



Above: Mittan and Mrs. Celia Golden in Santa Fe, New Mexico.



Above: Monica and Maria Cole at Mittan's daughter Celia's wedding in Princeton, New Jersey, 1999.

New Year's Eve 1974 was only a few weeks away. Goldie Hawn was now divorced and dating a Swede, Bruno Wintzell (who also knew Lany, but who didn't?), and they were going to Sweden for the holidays to visit Bruno's family. So Lany—who was also in Sweden at that time, and who was still friends with Monica, as well as her new husband Björn—invited them to Monica and Björn's new house in Veberöd (a few miles from Malmö) for a big New Year's Eve party. The couple gladly accepted his invitation, but unfortunately, they had to cancel at the last minute, and Monica never saw Goldie in person again.

Mittan and Monica both stayed in touch with Maria Cole for many years after their California days. In 1976, Monica and Björn went to the US for a medical conference in Lake Placid, and during their trip they were invited to visit Maria and Gary at ‘South House’ in Tyringham, Massachusetts. The four of them spent a lovely afternoon together before Gary took them into town to show them his restaurant, and to offer them some dinner, before they had to go back to the conference location.

In 1983, Mittan and Bengt moved back to the US—to Belle Mead, New Jersey, this time—after Bengt got a job there. One day, Mittan and her kids went up to visit Maria in Tyringham. When they got to her house, Mittan was so happy and honored to find out that her friend had saved all of the clothes the sisters had made for her over the years.

The grand, white house was quite impressive and beautiful, and the property also included six lovely guest houses. Hanna Mori, a famous designer, was staying in one of them at the time of their visit. “I also remember that a stream ran through the grounds where you could fish for salmon,” Mittan says. “My two sons, Pontus and Oscar, who were nine and ten years old at the time, were trying to play pool for the first time in a room that had all of Nat King Cole’s gold records on the walls, and they were a bit hesitant to hit the billiard balls in case one might accidentally bounce off the table and hit one of the invaluable framed records.” Maria Cole was also a guest at Mittan’s daughter Celia’s wedding in Princeton, New Jersey, in 1999, as was Bruce Golden along with his wife and daughter.

Mittan stayed in touch with Mrs. Golden for the rest of her life, and even honored her dear friend by naming her only daughter, Celia, after her.

Mittan also met Marlo Thomas again in Long Island, New York, where the actress was doing a book signing in the early ’80s to benefit her work with St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital. Marlo fondly recalled their time together in California many years prior and the many outfits the sisters had made for her.

Epilogue

Life did end up coming full circle for the Frössle sisters though. Today they have second homes next door to each other in Naples, Florida. So they both ended up back in the US again, at the same time, some fifty years later, but on the East Coast this time around. They each own a condo in the same country club, where they spend their days crocheting, knitting, reading, shopping, and golfing with their husbands and enjoying life with their visiting children and grandchildren. The two women both ended up getting remarried—in 1990, Mittan married Ted, a former insurance company owner in New Jersey whom she had met while searching for suitable insurance after her divorce from Bengt in 1986. Monica met her husband Lars on a dating website in 2009, and they tied the knot at the Swedish church in New York City in 2014.

In November, 2022, while scouring the internet for images of my mom and aunt's pieces to use for this book, I came across an online *Cosmopolitan* magazine article that listed the "62 Most Stunning Golden Globe Looks of All Time." My heart started pounding in my chest as I slowly scrolled down the list, not even daring to hope that my mom's dress might be on it. Suddenly, my mom's light blue dress appeared on the screen—the dress that Patty Duke wore while accepting her award—it had made it to number eleven on the list! I jumped out of my chair and did a little happy dance and couldn't wait to share this exciting news with my mom.



11 Patty Duke

Patty Duke ushered in the 1970s with a sheer netted dress and bold blue feather bell sleeves dress that was equal parts funky and fashionable.

In 2021, *Cosmopolitan* magazine voted Monica's light blue dress no. 11 out of 62 on their list of "The 62 Most Stunning Golden Globe Looks of All Time."
Copyright @ Getty Images.





This book has been a true labor of love for me. I have wanted to share this amazing story with the world for a very long time, and I'm so happy that dream has finally come true.

I hope you have enjoyed reading about Mittan and and Monica's inspiring adventure as much as I have enjoyed writing about it.s

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STORY:

This is a work of non-fiction. The story has been told to the author by Mittan and Monica and the events that take place in this book are based on their memories of this time. No names have been changed, no characters invented, and no events fabricated.

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THIS IS THE TRUE STORY OF TWO TALENTED, YOUNG SWEDISH WOMEN WHO DARED TO DREAM OF FASHION SUCCESS IN HOLLYWOOD.

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This is the story of their California adventure.



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