Chapter 1
From Ove to Bring

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1. Ove – From the Perspective of a Companion and Spouse

Ove has such an unsentimental view of his own writings. Many academics keep a detailed track record of what they have written and would not miss the opportunity to add something to their list of publications. This is certainly not the case with Ove. He deletes titles from his list. He likes the idea that if he adds a title, he should erase another, so as to keep the list short and focused. He has some sort of a written record, but its comprehensiveness is far from reliable and it certainly has a ‘best before’ date. He takes a similar approach to early editions of his books. If a new edition is printed, he gladly throws away the previous one. He himself knows exactly what he has written and when, but he sees few reasons to keep copies of everything he has written. Given the fact that he is a very well-organised person, this behaviour is an anomaly. It was not until recently, and just by chance, that I found out that he was co-author of a book on political developments in Latin America published in 1969.

Another characteristic example is the presentation of him as an author in his most recent book: *The Rise and Fall of Neutrality – or the History of Collective Security*. It only contains references to two of his previous books – both of which he has co-authored with a colleague. In the presentation he has not mentioned one of his own publications. “Why should I”, he said, “these two books are the most recent ones”. This is not a reflection of inverse snobbery – it is merely rationality.

I had taken it upon myself to present Ove’s writings. A reasonably straightforward task, I thought. That turned out to be a major miscalculation. Even I had underestimated Ove’s rational approach to his publications and the complications it led to in searching for copies of his books and articles. I had to get assistance from others. Dr. Ola Engdahl and the Library at the Defence College have been of great help. Ove’s youngest son Fredrik Bring was entrusted with the task of discreetly interviewing his father over a glass of beer or two. In disguising his interrogation behind his true

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interest in history and human rights (in general) and in his father's personal history (in particular), Fredrik was indeed very successful.1 It is a challenge to do research and to cover up one's writing when a seriously interested person is around and keeps asking what you are writing about. I had to hide my manuscript, searches for books, contacts with the editors, librarians and other relevant persons. All communications by private email had to be labelled “Administrative questions”, “Next planning meeting” or something that Ove would be genuinely uninterested in so as to prevent Ove from opening it. An additional complication was the fact that the work had to be undertaken at home (either in Stockholm or at Dalhems prästgård) and during vacations, weekends and holidays – when Ove is always around. I sometimes felt awkward – as if I was having an extramarital affair.

This compilation of Ove's writings does not encompass any of the legal analysis he made during his almost 20 years as a legal adviser on international law at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (1975–1993). As would have been the case with any legal adviser, Ove produced a considerable quantity of legal analysis on a variety of issues during this period. Nor does it contain a list of presentations made at international academic conferences, public hearings or debates, NGO events, lectures etc, since it would be impossible to make such a list. Both elements – written legal analysis and public presentations – are part of a legal adviser's or a professor's daily work and do not need to be mentioned separately. Furthermore, his contributions in arbitration cases and analysis provided to law firms are not included either, for obvious reasons.

However, his written contributions to newspapers are listed because they reflect Ove's engagement in the contemporary or cultural aspects of international law. When Ove left the Ministry he became more accessible to the media, but his interest in making international law known to a wider audience started early, as will be shown below.

So what, then, is the point of listing his writings? Well, the co-editors of the book, Pål Wrange and Ola Engdahl, and in addition, Ove's former doctoral student Gustaf Lind and myself, thought that it would assist in giving a relevant presentation of his work to colleagues who meet him in the international arena. Ove is of the view that it is important to write in his mother tongue Swedish and the major bulk of his work is therefore published in Swedish. To write in a minority language, which can be read easily only in the Nordic countries, is quite unusual these days, when most international lawyers find it important to write solely in English. The use of words, grammar and syntax are important elements in all Ove's writings and he prefers to weigh his words on a golden scale in his own language, than on a silver scale in a foreign language.

I have known Ove as an international lawyer for a very long time and as my spouse for a somewhat shorter time. It is not difficult to respect Ove's knowledge, integrity, interest and concentration. However, his habit of entitling his articles and presentations: "From X to Z" has never appealed to me. I find it repetitious and somewhat unexciting. Ove, who genuinely dislikes non-comprehensive and pretentious

1 I am also indebted to Mr Timothy Chamberlain at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs for his assistance in translating the titles of Ove Bring's books and articles and for assisting me in checking my language. In addition to his professional assistance, Timothy has taken the time to answer my questions with respect to certain formulations and to the tone of the article.