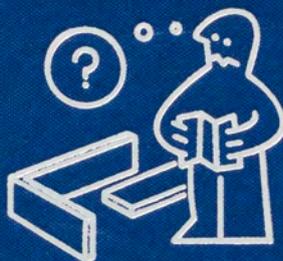


INNOVATION THE SWEDISH WAY

Henrik Berggren Eva Krutmeijer



MAX STRÖM

Moving forward

THE ROLLATOR

Aina Wifalk suffered from polio when she was 21 years old. The disease affected her badly, but eventually it led to one of the most important innovations for people whose bodies need support in their daily lives – the rollator.

In 1949, Aina Wifalk had just started studying to become a nurse. She started to feel ill, with a sore throat and fatigue, but those symptoms soon gave way to muscle cramps that radiated down to her feet. She was admitted to hospital. Within a month of her initial mild symptoms, she was unable to stand or walk.

The illness forced Wifalk to drop out of her nursing course. But it did not prevent her from studying, and eventually she got a job as a hospital counsellor. She had a real talent for helping people with various disabilities. She got around with the help of two long walking sticks.

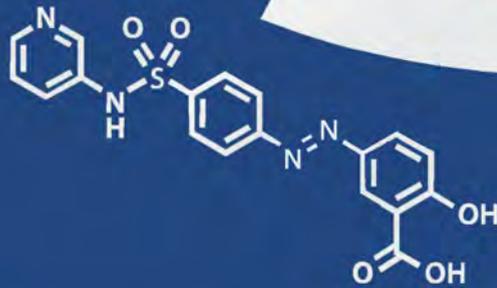
Aina Wifalk was a driving force in welfare issues and established a number of patients' associations, including groups for people with multiple sclerosis and victims of traffic accidents. By the mid-1970s, though, her shoulders had suffered damage, and her life became more restricted. At night she would lie awake and wonder how she could regain at least some mobility.

Perhaps she was inspired by the book trolleys used by librarians; perhaps she thought of kicksleds with metal runners that were commonly used in winter at that time. When she had formulated her idea – a walking frame on wheels – she submitted a proposal to a government innovation fund, which gave her a small grant and put her in contact with a fabricator. Besides four wheels, Wifalk wanted her device to have handles and brakes, and it should also be collapsible for easy transport. She knew which features were important. That was in 1978, and production began three years later.

Looking back, we can say that Aina Wifalk's innovation has become a means to give people their freedom back. She never patented the rollator, since she wanted the innovation to spread freely. Before she passed away at the age of 55 in 1983, she was delighted to see that her rollator was gaining users in many countries. In Sweden it is used by every third person over the age of 80.

Aina Wifalk was affected by polio and had difficulty walking. She solved the problem by designing a wheeled walking frame that was further refined into the modern-day rollator.





No other country has produced as many revolutionary innovations per capita as Sweden. This is the story of 50 of these Swedish ideas, discoveries and inventions that have changed the world.

