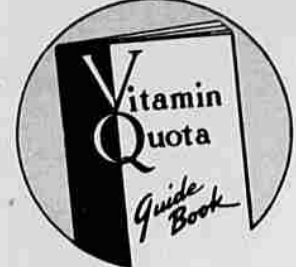


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FLOREANA—
A Modern
Swiss Family
Robinson

Margret Wittmer doesn't know it yet, but a valuable letter is waiting for her.



ILLUSTRATION BY FRANK GOLDEN

They survived hardship and near-tragedy in settling a remote island; now comes the happy time—and an ironic message from the past that tells them how rich they are

By MARGRET WITTMER

• On the primitive Pacific island in the Galapagos off Ecuador where the Wittmer family moved from Germany in 1932, contact with civilization came only with visits of ships. Some brought news of the outside world, some took news back about the "Swiss Family Robinson" of Floreana. A son, Rolf, was born the first year and a daughter, Inge, four years later. There were tragedies, too: Dr. Karl Ritter, who delivered their children, died, and their eldest son, Harry, whose ill health brought them to Floreana, lost his life in a boating accident. Their brave experiment caught the imagination of the world and brought many famous visitors, among them President Franklin D. Roosevelt, anthropologist Thor Heyerdahl, and a Walt Disney expedition. In the final chapter of our story condensed from "Floreana" by Margret Wittmer, to be published by E. P. Dutton in April, 25 years have passed since the Wittmers first came to their island home. It is the day Rolf, the boy born in a cave, is to marry Paquita Garcia, a mainland girl whose brother operated the only radio station. War and the story of the Wittmers have brought some 50 other families and the inroads of civilization to Floreana, including the radio station.

WHEN I LOOKED at Rolf on his wedding day, I thought of his birth in a cave nearly 25 years before. He was the first European to be born on the island; now he would be the first to get married.

The wedding would take place on my birthday, when we would also celebrate our 25th anniversary as settlers. Everything was ready for the wedding, including the cattle, pigs, and 35 chickens for roasting. Now we had only to wait for the guests to arrive; but at 10 p.m. on July 10 a radio message came from the governor of the Galapagos saying the

launch could not come, having run out of fuel. The next morning I settled down at Floreana's radio station to arrange for a chartered boat to bring the guests, the governor's delegation, and the Monsignor who was to perform the ceremony.

Everything was ready for receiving guests, but at midday, when Heinz, my husband, came down from the farm, there still were no guests to receive. I was growing extremely agitated, but Heinz only laughed; "Good heavens, woman, nobody would think you'd been 25 years on the Galapagos the way you worry about minor delays! Haven't you learned anything?" He was right. In time, our guests arrived.

The civil ceremony took place in the morning, and the governor's representative performed it most impressively. He delivered a short address to the bride and groom before declaring them man and wife. Paquita was so wrought up she could scarcely sign her name afterward, and I thought I noticed that Rolf's eyes were moist.

Then we went to the "church," one of the big acacia trees near the house. Candles burning, white and colored tablecloths, a carpet, a sea of gay flowers, bright clothes and uniforms, the bride and groom in the foreground, Paquita in a lovely wedding dress—all under the broad "roof" of the tree with the blue sky above. No wedding could have had a more solemn and beautiful scene.

Our first meal on Floreana had been rice pudding cooked in the open on the beach. Now we stood in our fine house near the beach, holding glasses and drinking toasts to Rolf and his bride Paquita.

Presents came from all over the world. When Paquita looked at them after the wedding breakfast, tears streamed down her cheeks. "Tanto cariño! Tanto cariño para mi!" she repeated over and over. "So much love for me!"