

AN UNFORGETTABLE WEEK IN HELSINKI

RMP
Sabbatical
Our diary - More
than you'll want
to know about
Finland RMD

On Monday evening, May 28, 1984, we arrived in Helsinki after a two-day's visit with friends and colleagues in Goteborg, Sweden. At 10 p.m., the sun was still very bright as was the smile on the face of our friend, Pekka Koivistoinen, who met us at the airport. Pekka, chairman of the Department of Food Chemistry and Technology at the University of Helsinki, is a jovial, hospitable person. He was so pleased that his nominations for TWO honorary doctorates in Food Science had been approved - that of Dr. Rakel Kurkela of his department and mine. (Rakel had spent several months in my laboratory in 1967 while on a study tour of the U.S., and we had visited with her and her husband, Pentti, several times since). Furthermore, three of the young assistant professors in his department had completed their doctorates and would be participating in the ceremonies, also.

Pekka recited the long list of activities that were planned for us, but we didn't realize how intensive it would be until later. We were checked into our apartment on the third floor of the guest house of the Ministry of Education on Messenuiskatu, where the landlord, Ollie Salo, gave us our keys and a list of regulations and "house rules." After noting a big kitchen, a bath and a separate toilet (to be shared with our suite-mates who were to arrive in two days), we retired until the bright sun awoke us the next morning - a 2:00 a.m.!

Fortunately, the following day was relatively free. We walked to a nearby bank to change money, bought some groceries at a small neighborhood market, and prepared a modest breakfast in our kitchen. At 10 a.m., Aila Laakso, Pekka's secretary, came for us and we took the tram downtown for Rose Marie to be fitted at the hatmakers and Jack at the tailors. E. R. Wahlman, the hatmaker, is the only one in the world that makes these "graduation" hats, which resemble those of the Pilgrim Fathers (with University gold emblem rather than the buckle), and cost \$120! Jack's fancy black trousers needed a tuck, as he had apparently lost some girth since we sent them the original waist measurements. The seamstress made immediate modifications, his outfit was packaged for us to take and we were on our own. We explored the city, having a tasty lunch at the cafeteria at "Stockman's," a large, multi-storied department store. (We very much favor cafeteria dining while traveling - good selections and quick.) The fact that we had to return to the bank twice attests to how smitten we were with Finnish ceramics and other handicrafts. By late afternoon we drug ourselves to the tram to return to the apartment. In our absence, a pretty floral arrangement of lilies of the valley, national flower of Finland had arrived, courtesy of Rakel and Pentti Kurkela. After resting, we had a late (expensive) dinner at the nearby Hotel International.

Wednesday, Pekka drove us to Viikki, the near-by suburb where the University is located. We were introduced to the food science faculty over coffee and sweet rolls where the staff discussed their research with us. R. M. presented a one-hour seminar/slide show to about 40 faculty and students, then twelve of us were honored at a fancy luncheon. The five of us food science "doctors" received flowers. We very much enjoyed a glass of delicious Finnish champagne made from berries, not realizing we would be toasting frequently with it for the next several days. After lunch, we had an hour's briefing session on the extensive details of the ceremonies for the next three days - times, places, people, events, dress, etc. It was 5 p.m. when Hely Tourila, a young

faculty member in food science, drove us back to our apartment. She's working in sensory analysis and nutrition, so she and Rose Marie talked shop in the kitchen for a couple of hours. To our pleasant surprise, in walks Ollie Salo with our suite-mates, Dr. and Mrs. Bjorn Isaksson of Goteborg. He's a nutritionist whom R. M. had met years ago in Sweden, but we didn't know until then that he too was to receive an honorary doctorate.

Thursday, the fun began. In the morning, we ran downtown to spend more Finnish marks and go back to the good cafeteria at Stockmans. But, by 3 p.m. we were dressed in our full regalia. It was almost 90 F in the shade. Jack was in black tails with white vest, gloves, top hat and pretty ruffled shirt, and R. M. was in a long black skirt, blue satin blouse with georgette sleeves, and long black gloves. Pekka drove us to the National Theatre near the harbor, where we had a two-hour dress rehearsal. The director of the event, Professor Eeva Tapio, lined us up, gave us marching orders, had us practice gliding to our seats and up to the dais to simulate the conferral of degrees, how to bow, etc. Fortunately for us, she spoke four languages and managed to keep us in line (I christened her Dr. Achtung; she is head of the department of plant pathology at U. Helsinki.)

Next was the two-hour Rector's champagne reception where we made important small talk with the past and present deans, rector, chancellors and their wives. Then into a bus for transport to a fancy restaurant for the first of three banquets in three days. The guests and their spouses were interspersed to become acquainted, and we admired our Finnish hosts' ability to speak three to six languages with the people at their tables. The menu we don't recall, but the champagne was nice. After several speeches (Finnish then translation into Swedish and English), we were called upon to introduce ourselves and describe our work. Then we realized that 18 would receive honorary doctorates, 10 were Finnish scientists, plus two from Sweden, two from West Germany, and one each from Norway, East Germany, England, and the U.S. for a total of 15 men and 3 women. They represented various fields of agriculture and forestry. Most were in their mid-sixties, with R. M. the youngest. Then followed a complicated "sword sharpening" ceremony, a kind of symbolic recall of the days when knowledge, honor and truth were defended to the death with the sword. Fortunately, they didn't test the sharpness of the sword on us. Four hours later, despite full sunlight we knew it must be late because the old eyelids were drooping. Not to worry, the dance at the student center was next on the agenda. The 152 students who were to receive masters degrees had just finished their banquet when we arrived and the orchestra was tuning up. We older vintages went through a few paces and through many refreshments as the night was warm, and we managed to hurry home before dark (12:30 a.m.).

FRIDAY, WAS THE BIG DAY. It started with the delivery of yet another beautiful floral arrangement (yellow roses) and a big bottle of champagne from Pekka and his wife, Seija, who came in full black regalia to fetch us in a taxi at 11 a.m. Professor Achtung was waiting for us at the great auditorium where she assembled us, reminded us of our paces and we waited for the strident strains of music to announce our march. (The older lady, Dr. Sirkka Kouki, a diabetic, discreetly munched food to sustain her through the five hours.) Jack and Pentti had found their seats in the front row with the other "avecs" (spouses of the honorary doctors). They were the two men among the 12 women avecs. In we marched, two at a time along with the television cameras and pro-

essional photographers who provided constant flashes of brilliant light. It was over 80 F already. For three hours we heard the beautiful music of the famous Finnish composer, Sibelius, the excellent University choir, the speeches of the dean and other administrators (Finnish, Swedish, English), the oral examination of the representative student from the earned doctors, and from the masters, more music from Vivaldi, Grieg, and Mozart, and finally the conferral of degrees. The masters students, women in long, white gowns (high neck, long sleeve; men in black tails, black vest) received diplomas and the Promoter, Dr. Leo Heikurainen, crowned them with a laurel wreath. The laurel leaves had been flown in from Greece and the students had made their own wreaths at a ceremony the preceding evening. The approximately 40 people who received earned doctorate degrees were dressed as we were, women in long black dresses, high neck, long sleeve, gloves and men in black tails. The Promoter presented each in turn with the diploma and the black "Pilgrim" hat. For each honorary doctor, the Promoter called the name, the person stood and the full citation was read, in the recipient's own language (Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, German, or English), then the person solemnly strode up the steps to the podium, received the diploma, had the hat placed on his head, bowed to the Promoter, turned and bowed to the audience and returned to their seat (facing the audience). In addition to receiving the diploma and the hat, one highlight was listening to the entire audience sing the Finnish national anthem, a beautiful rousing song.

Suddenly, up strides Prof. Achtung, in her black gown and hat and large red satin sash to lead us out of the theater, two abreast, down the steps onto the red carpet placed on the cobble stoned street, a block and a half to the cathedral. The degree recipients were followed in the procession by the audience, also in full dress, including all men in tails and top hat. Meanwhile, back at Creyline tours, the camera-laden tourists had been notified and they poured out of their big tour busses to photograph us from every angle. Instamatic camera shots by American, German and Japanese tourists utilized a lot of Kodak film as we trudged to and from the cathedral. (I can just hear them in Peoria, (Frankfurt and Osaka): "Look Gertrude (Brunhilda, Kicko), see the funny Finnish natives in their halloween costumes.") The cathedral was beautiful and serene. I secretly thanked the archbishop for delivering his hour-long speech only in Finnish, foregoing the Swedish and English translation, as it was at least 85 F. At last Prof. Achtung marched us with great dignity back through the tourists to the original theater. There, parents and friends were engaged in happy embraces and photography. With Pekka and Seija, we tried for ages to find a taxi, and finally caught the tram back to the apartment (still in full regalia, with the stares and gapes of the whole populace in their mini-shorts and thongs).

We got back to the apartment to gear up for the second formal banquet - this time R. M. must wear the pilgrim's hat for all occasions, in addition to black gloves, long black dress, and a little discreet jewelry. Off by taxi again, to the "Kalastajatorppa" (Fisherman's Cottage) Restaurant, which in spite of its name is a spacious, elegant place on the waterfront. It was interesting to see dozens of taxis arrive one behind the other with their black-robed occupants emerging as in an assembly line. We had champagne toasts on the rolling lawn near the sealine, in preparation for the 6-hour banquet.

Doors of the dining hall were closed to keep out the loud band in the ballroom next door. Over 300 people in heavy black dress barely survived the

unexpected "sauna" as the temperature must have hit 90 F. Our Finnish hosts kept marvelling at the weather saying it was the earliest Spring and the warmest in 100 years. We do remember the delicious reindeer meat and the refreshing lemon ice and cloudberry, lingonberry, and cranberry liquers at the end. But the 5-hour interval between is a haze of speeches and champagne toasts (Finnish, Swedish, English), where everyone grabs his napkin from his lap and stumbles to his feet to raise his glass. Yes, the berry champagne was still very tasty. Although very talented, it was difficult to appreciate the violin and piano and vocal solos, which were interspersed with dozens of speeches and toasts. It must have been the heat, because it was there that R. M. was asked, "Which Scandinavian country are you from?" and "You're from Germany, nien?" (At least no one asked about J. R. or Toney Anaya.)

At approximately 2 a.m. we were standing outside the restaurant ("ravintola" in Finnish) awaiting taxis, when a group of about 12 tuxedo-dressed men and 2 women came in, speaking Spanish very rapidly. They stared at us in our black witches dresses and hat and muttered, "Han de ser Italianos, pero no, están muy silencios."

Saturday morning we can rest, no? No, but at least we could get into casual wear for the drive to the student picnic at Suitia agricultural experimental station in Siuntio (40 miles west of Helsinki). There, students, their spouses and children enjoyed country music, more speeches, dancing folkdances on the lawn, and a big picnic lunch. All Finns wore their white "sailor" hats with the emblem of the school from which they graduated. The country musicians looked like Mennonites - hats, beards, guitars. They were followed by a Barbershop Quartet, talented students who sang old American ballads, U.S. Negro spirituals, and Finnish folksongs. After lunch, another brass band arrived, dressed in blue jumpsuits and the beat went on. We, however, went on a tour of the country-side, including an interesting farmhouse museum on a little island just off-shore Helsinki. We saw and photographed the old-time homes, churches, farm buildings, boathouses, etc.

Back to the apartment to rest? No way, it's time for the real formal event - the grand ball! The elegant ballroom of the Student Union was decorated with hundreds of long-stemmed roses. Women who received masters degrees were dressed in long white formals, those who received doctorates were still in witch's garb, including top hat. All men were handsome in black tails. Female spouses provided the color in their pretty formals. To our surprise and admiration, the dances were formalized 19th century minuets, mazurkas, promenades, for which the participants had spent long hours practicing. Such complicated fancy footwork, bowing, and curtsing, we hadn't seen since the Hollywood production of "War and Peace." It was beautiful. Of course Prof. Achtung was the mayor domo, leading the partners through their intricate patterns. Pekka coerced R. M. into dancing a slow waltz, so she could boast of dancing in top hat and gloves. But Jack wouldn't budge. He took several photos of the colorful events.

Anymore surprises? Of course! At intermission, out came the palauquin, the armchair on rails that was lifted shoulder-high to carry dignitaries around the ballroom. The rector, dean, promoter, Prof. Achtung, and selected top students were singled out and in turn were carried around to the beat of vquin,

and salutes of the crowd. Ready for an informal midnight snack in the adjacent cafeteria? It was delicious, despite the fact that halfway through someone reminded us that the formal banquet was in an hour. Again another banquet of champagne and speeches. This time R.M. got seated next to the host and had to give her share of toasts. By 2 a.m. the last cognac was finished and we descended to the doors of the ballroom to form an arch of long-stem roses for the Promoter to walk through on his departure. The students invited us to go to a hill (don't know where since Helsinki is flat) to toast the sunrise (don't know which one since it hadn't gotten dark), we declined and headed home.

Sunday at 9 a.m. the telephone awoke us. Pekka and Seija were on their way to bid us farewell, before they departed for the country. They have a family strawberry farm outside of Helsinki which they manage. Through sleepy eyes we thanked them for yet another lovely bouquet of flowers and served tea in our little kitchen. At noon, Rakel and Pentti took us to a private museum, in a lovely birch-wooded area then to lunch in the suburbs at Hvittrast (White Birch), the former home of six artists, including Eero Saarinen, the famous architect. The three artist families shared a big series of connected apartments which they designed, built and decorated personally. Beautiful. That evening, Rakel and Pentti invited us to their home, a cozy place on an offshore island, Kuulosaren. We met their daughter-in-law, Liisa, and their son, Matti, who just returned from the U.S. where he completed his masters in law at Harvard and worked in a N. Y. lawfirm for a year.

Monday at 9 a.m. Hely Tourila and Rakel picked us up and drove us 70 miles southwest to Hanko, where Hely's parents raise hens for egg production. Although the parents speak only Finnish, they couldn't have been more hospitable. We appreciated their impeccable, colorfully-decorated big farm home and the incredible number of traditional dishes they served in a Finnish smorgasbord. Several fish, meat, salad, vegetable, casserole dishes and several types of delicious home-made breads. The neighbors had helped Mrs. T. prepare the equivalent of a wedding banquet. In terms of food, that was the unforgettable meal. Mr. T. was giving us a tour of the farm through the forest area where they raise birch for paper mills, when a torrential cloud burst drenched us. Hely ran back for the car and drove us back to the house. We expressed our appreciation for the parent's hospitality as best we could and Hely drove us back to Helsinki, with a stop en route at a glass factory. Fortunately we already had full suitcases, else we would have loaded up on the lovely ceramics, crystal, porcelain, etc., some of which was very cheap as some were seconds.

Monday night R. M. crashed with a sore throat and we canceled our dinner invitation. Perky Jack, however, started packing in order to accommodate the two extra suitcases we were to bring back to Davis. (A Finnish post-doctorate in Davis, Seppo Lindroth, is returning to Finland in September and wanted extra suitcases from his parents to bring back his "loot.")

Tuesday noon, Rakel and Pentti took us to lunch at the Pekhonen (Butterfly) restaurant which is run by a cooking school. Then back to load the suitcases and they took us out to the airport. Would you believe, Hely and Lea were there with flowers to bid us farewell. We collapsed on the British Air flight to London. We recuperated somewhat, in anticipation of meeting a British colleague, Harry Nursten of Reading, for dinner. Harry awaited us in the

lobby of our hotel, the Penta Heathrow, and drove us to nearby Winsor for a lovely meal at a restaurant overlooking the Thames river. On Wednesday we took a three-hour boat trip of the Thames - impressive - did some shopping at Harrod's, where we had a light dinner and returned to the Penta to pack for our next-day return flight to San Francisco.

Whew!!