

A short guide to  
**SURVIVING FINLAND**

with as much of your sanity intact as possible, or at least to  
avoiding being eaten by ravenous seals if keeping your sanity is  
flat-out impossible; containing diverse useful facts and astute  
observations

by Mr. "O"  
(unillustrated by the same)

This guide is scientifically accurate, thoroughly researched,  
state-approved, politically correct and all-round pleasant if and  
only if cows fly.

(They don't. Not even in Finland.)

# Chapter 1

## Finland — huh?

Finland is located in northern Europe, between Sweden in the west and Russia in the east. In west and south it touches the Baltic Sea. In utter north it borders Norway; in south across the gulf, Estonia. Consult a map for more.

There are about 5 million Finns (inhabitants of Finland, that is), and they for the most part speak Finnish, a fiendishly difficult language not related to either Russian, Swedish or English. <sup>1</sup>

A small coastal minority of five percent speaks Swedish; they're the descendants of settlers that came from Sweden a long time ago. Because of this, and because of an historical fact that will be discussed in detail later, all Finnish schoolchildren learn...err, are taught the Finnish variant of the Swedish language. Most schoolchildren feel this is rather useless, since it only gives them the means to talk to Finland's Swedish-speakers (who almost invariably know Finnish) or to Sweden's Swedes, who no-one wants to talk to anyway.

Sorry about that, Swedes. Hey, at least you are more palatable

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<sup>1</sup>A note to language-nuts: Finnish is Uralic in origin and thus not related to any Indo-European language such as English, French, German, Russian, or the like. Language-wise Finns' only relatives are the Hungarians, the Estonians, and various dying tribes in Siberia.

than the Norwegians. . . though that's not much.

As a further note on language, all Finnish schoolchildren learn English, too, and learn it much more (and with a better motivation, one might add) than Swedish: after all, English allows one to discuss all kinds of fascinating things with foreigners, and to navigate Internet's various sites offering anatomical photography. Finnish children go all through a nine-year elementary education (*peruskoulu*), and after that go either into vocational training or into a three-year high school (*lukio*) and usually after it into higher vocational training or into universities, expecting a master's degree after five years of hitting their bony foreheads against thick, thick books.

The capital of Finland is Helsinki, in the southern coast. Roughly one million Finns — a fifth of the populace — live in the capital or near it. They consider themselves a bit more civilized and cosmopolitan lot than the other Finns. The other Finns consider them elitist prigs. The city's name is pronounced with a double 'l' and a silent 'ki'. No, that was just a joke. Sorry. From now on, this booklet will be totally humor-free.

Finns are ruled by an uncontrollable urge for beer and televised ice hockey, and governed by a parliament of two hundred rascals and a directly elected president.

## Chapter 2

### Penguins

There are absolutely *no* penguins, Inuits, polar bears or igloes in Finland. There *are* reindeer, Sami, common bears, and common housing aplenty. The Sami live in northern Finland and are a bit like Inuits but not very much: they dress in much more colorful fashion, and instead of harnessing seals in front of their sleds (as Inuits do) they use reindeer.<sup>1</sup>

About half of Finland is made of trees and swamps; the rest is mosquitoes during the summer and snow during the winter.

The most common Finnish animals are the bear, the wolf, the rabbit and the squirrel. Not the penguin, and certainly not the polar bear. Finnish bears are quite unpolar — brown, furry animals that live on berries, rabbits and an occasional berry-picker. The reader should resign himself to the fact that, in a standard urban setting, he will probably only see an occasional squirrel, and maybe a rabbit. If, however, a three-ton bear with foot-long razor-sharp claws makes an appearance, it will be totally fine to go and scratch it behind the ears.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For the southern reader's enlightenment, let it be said that reindeer are, essentially, hairy deer with big antlers. For an explanation of what Inuits are, consult the excellent volume *500 reasons why Finland beats the North Pole hands down*, by the same author.

<sup>2</sup>Okay, it won't be totally fine. Actually, that will result in a quick and

There are mosquitoes, too. Due to the blessing of urban pollution, cities are mostly mosquito-free, but the countryside is absolutely infested, absolutely crawling with the maddening little creatures. During the winter they all die, but when the summer comes around again they are resurrected by the Finnish Lady Nature in her never-ending effort to cleanse these lands of all human life. Finnish mosquitoes are not the kind that aims for eyes or nostrils; they 'just' whine and they suck blood. The whine is much worse, and (so it seems at times) audible to a distance of some fifty kilometers. The mosquitoes are, in fact, much worse than any vampires would be, since vampires at least move silently. And vampires dress better, too, and while ladies of a certain romantic persuasion might conceivably be charmed by a Transylvanian count, no woman ever has loved a speck-sized brainless whining bloodsucker from the swamps.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the cities are not infested by wolves. One does not, according to the Tourist Bureau, need to be concerned over facts like, for example, the name *Hukanhauta*, or Wolf-Grave, one of the boroughs of the city of Joensuu. It's just an example of Finnish humor. And if you see something suspicious, they are not wolves, they're just very big dogs. Just don't go near them, and don't go out when it's dark, all right?

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messy horrible death, but hey, it's quicker than trying to run away, and the end result is same.

<sup>3</sup>Well, except the wives of certain tax officials, but let's not discuss that here.

## Chapter 3

### Santa

Oh, and despite persistent reports to the contrary, Santa Claus *does* live in Finland. All tales about him living in the North Pole are total and utter balderdash. Santa Claus lives on the slopes of Korvatunturi (or Ear Fell) in northern Finland, along with his little helpers that are called gnomes, in Finnish *tonttu* (the plural is *tontut*).<sup>1</sup> They aren't called elves, and they don't dress in green. They dress in red, are short and dumpy, and spy on people to know whether they've been naughty or nice. (A bit like KGB, really.) Santa Claus doesn't enter houses through chimneys; he uses doors just like anyone else. Really, did you believe a man of that girth could actually fit through a chimney?

If you thought otherwise you've just been misdirected by the gnomes' clever ploy to keep their real home secret. Now you know the truth. Better to keep your windows locked for a few days just in case the gnomes try to 'silence' you.

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<sup>1</sup>An alternative to *tontut* is *pikku-ukot*, which is usually used as a more generic term for various odd folks one sees after too many cups of beer, or after several bites of the good old hallucinogenic and highly poisonous fly agaric mushroom (*kärpässieni*) which, apparently, was used to relieve the tedium of winters in Finland before the invention of beer.

## Chapter 4

### Ancient history

Finns have lived in Finland for a long time, probably since the latest Ice Age ended. They were, even in the beginning, cursed with the most obnoxious neighbors possible: Swedes and other Vikings in the west, and Russians in the east. Both loot-hungry barbarians-turned-civilized and thus permitted to savage other barbarians just as much as they wished, oh my.<sup>1</sup>

Finns were content living in the woods, around their ten thousand lakes, growing wheat, distilling teeth-dissolving alcohol, getting drunk on it (or getting seriously skewed by snorting powdered fly agaric, but that's another tale entirely) and singing about their pagan gods, for a long, long time.

Drinking, one should add, is still very popular in Finland. There really isn't much else to do during the winters, since singing about pagan gods is somehow unfashionable nowadays. Ah well, back to the history.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, under the pretext of spreading Christianity, Swedes crossed the Baltic in several waves and grabbed a hold of Finland's coasts, and of anything of commercial value that could

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<sup>1</sup>Sorry about that. The writer is just jealous — Finns never got to wear those nice Viking helmets with horns on them. No, just kidding.

be pried loose. Finns called these 'crusades' something else entirely, but since they were heathen barbarians, no-one was interested. After a long time and at least one episode that involved a bishop, a farmer and an axe, and ended very badly for the bishop, Christianity took root.

Finns spent many centuries under the Swedish rule. During that time Sweden became a world power, mainly by fighting numerous wars. Finns were very good in fighting as long as someone told them who they were supposed to fight. In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Sweden first lost Finland to Russia, and then forthwith lost its status as a world power.<sup>2</sup>

Russia gave Finland the status of a grand duchy (with the Czar<sup>3</sup> as the Grand Duke), and Finland was autonomous to some extent. At that time Finns began to think that some more autonomy would a spiffy idea indeed: having Finnish postal stamps was nice, but still not *quite* enough. For a time, however, all went well. Then the Czars changed. The new-style Russian Czars didn't approve of anyone being anything except Russian and absolutely obedient to them in their dominions, so several years of Russification, oppression and discontent (and danger to the supply of Finnish postal stamps!) followed in the beginning of the 20th century. What rights had been given to the Finns were taken away, and promises that had been held sacred were broken by the Czars and their Russophile lackeys. One specific Finnish man became rather agitated by this and fired three bullets at the Russian General-Governor and one more at his own head. This, apart from two deaths, of course did not change anything.<sup>4</sup>

When the Czar then finally discovered that what goes around

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<sup>2</sup>Sorry, Swedes, but that was too delicious a phrase to be left out.

<sup>3</sup>Czar means the Russian emperor. You didn't need to be told this, now did you?

<sup>4</sup>The writer mentioned this just because history is quite dry if not properly wettened with blood.

comes around (and that, in this case, was communism), Finns decided that they probably wouldn't like the Soviets any more than they liked the Czars and so they declared independence. That was in 1917, near the end of the First World War. (That war left Finland untouched.)

Some Finns, however, thought Communism was a splendid idea. Some did not, and thus the Finnish Civil War was fought in 1918. The 'did nots', or Whites, won. Both sides did nasty things to their prisoners, and the Whites were in an all too easy position to do nasty things after they won.

The Finnish people, after gaining their independence, in these final moments of the First World War, naturally decided to adopt the most successful model of government possible, and elected a German prince to be their king.

Some months later the prince declined due to the disastrous collapse of the German Empire. Finns were embarrassed and chose a local man whose name translates as 'Steel-Mountain' as their president. He was, after some years, followed by a fellow whose name translates as 'Pig's-Head'; the presidents after that have had less interesting names.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1930s some Finns attempted to follow in the footsteps of Mussolini, but they didn't gain enough support to succeed, probably because the winter is too cold for the necessary chest-pounding furor. Besides, Finns aren't any good in soldierly marching-information, which is apparently required for that sort of a government.

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<sup>5</sup>One might note that one subsequent president was Kallio, or 'Cliff', and another Paasikivi, or 'Stone Slab'. Finns like names that don't budge.

# Chapter 5

## More history

The events of the Second World War are still the greatest source of pride and drunken boasting among Finns, so this next section is devoted to them.<sup>1</sup>

In the thirties, two dictators called Hitler and Stalin discussed the future of Europe and decided that Finland would look much better if you wrote the 'S' of Soviet Union over it on the map. No-one asked the Finns: after all, what could a nation of three million whose main exports were snow and grumbling be expected to say?

In the beginning of the Second World War, in 1939, the Soviets accused the Finns of shooting over the border with a cannon. How strange it was that it was a cannon whose like the Finns didn't even have, and how curious that in the Soviet arsenals those cannons were plentiful! How lucky that the poor, insulted Soviet Union had, by a freak chance, quite many divisions lurking at the Finnish border! Thus the Winter War of 1939-40 began.

The western countries such as England and France were much

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<sup>1</sup>The other common sources of manly obnoxiousness when intoxicated: 2. Ice hockey success, 3. Rally car driving success, 4. Success in any other sport, preferably one including men moving at unsafe speeds, 5. Lack of success in any of the subjects already mentioned

concerned and outraged by the Soviets' behavior, and as a result did quite nothing.<sup>2</sup>

The reader should excuse the writer for the small amount of chest-pounding that follows; it is inevitable when explaining the history of one's particular tribe, clan or nation to outsiders. And, oh, the man that discovered fire was probably Finnish, too. And ancient Troy was situated in the south coast of Finland. Sorry. Now, during the Second World War...

The Soviets invaded with some one million men, three thousand tanks, and almost four thousand aircraft. The Finnish army of around quarter-million was armed mainly with cockades, and with rifles left over from the First World War.<sup>3</sup>

The war did not go very well for the Soviets: their divisions stopped in the forests, frostbitten and demoralized. The Finns had the rather unchivalric way of shooting from the cover of the woods and then skiing away across the high snows to where the Russians could not follow. The roads were few and poor, as were the Russians' winter garments. Meanwhile, the Finns were saunabathing and chuckling evilly, and taking potshots at the Russian field kitchens. Many divisions stopped, and attacks from the woods cut their camps into pieces, and those pieces were then destroyed by the winter and the Finns.

It was the coldest winter in memory, and the poor Soviet soldiers from sunny Ukraine were woefully unprepared. The Finnish soldiers — called 'the white death' by the Soviets — were of course

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<sup>2</sup>Well, they *did* contemplate sending an army through Norway into Sweden to deny Germans the possible use of Swedish iron ore fields, and thus defending Finns against the Russians. Neat, eh? Insert bitter grumbling here.

<sup>3</sup>Cockades aren't some secret weapons; 'cockade' is, according to the dictionary, a proper English word for the small metal or plastic army insignia pin one wears in a cap or hat. Amazing, the things you learn in the most unexpected places, right?

exactly the sort of skiing, wilderness-hiking, winter-bathing, rolling-in-the-snow-naked-after-a-sauna-just-for-the-kicks sort of guys you still see around today.

Finns were quite patriotic about all this. The unpleasant happenings of the previous decades were forgotten, and Finland was quite unified against the invader. Ah, the wonders of xenophobia! The Red Army got such a bloody nose that Stalin saw it was better to negotiate than to conquer. Finland lost a sizeable patch of land from its east marches and gained a grudge. Finns began, with laudable pacifism, immediately calling the after-war period 'the Temporary Peace'.

When the Nazis then attacked the Soviet Union in 1941 the Finns were eager to join in<sup>4</sup>, and marched well past the previous borders before digging in. The separate German troops sent to attack the Soviet Union through the northernmost parts of Finland advanced less handsomely. While the war raged on elsewhere, Finnish soldiers sat in their well-decorated dugouts several hundreds of kilometers east of the old border, carving aesthetic wooden cups and lining the communications trenches with artistic arrays of pinecones.

Altogether, everything went splendidly until the Germans lost their luck and decided to conquer a city called Stalingrad in the south, which Stalin himself didn't like at all — and the result of that attempt is common knowledge. In that rout Finns were thrown back and again, rather than being conquered, negotiated a peace with the Soviet Union. No Soviet military trumpets in Finnish markets this time either.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>The Nazis were a bunch of irrational murderers, but the reader should remember that it was a choice between Hitler and Stalin, and Hitler hadn't tried to conquer all of Finland. When you have to choose between two hungry lions you choose the one that doesn't salivate while looking at you.

<sup>5</sup>As a note: How many of the WWII Axis powers or their allies were never occupied by an enemy power after the war? One — Finland. (It was probably

The Soviets grasped some more land off Finland, and Finland yielded. There went a tenth of Finland, and there came half a million Finns more willing to move west than to live under the Soviets. Finland paid heavy war reparations and paid them all, and went on with no harmful side effects except an irresistible urge to boast about the war. Finland didn't become a member of the Soviet bloc; it didn't turn into a communist dictatorship.<sup>6</sup> Thus Finland missed out on the present colorful market of pre-used communist memorabilia.

Since Finns found themselves now living next to the Soviet bear they wisely decided it wasn't sensible to go kicking the aforesaid bear in the privates, and maintained at least some semblance of good relations with it. Since some (read American) readers may find this a bit difficult to understand, let me frame it to them this way: Suppose the state of New Hampshire declared independence from the United States and got it. Would it be prudent for that new country to send raiding parties over the border and to publicly burn Stars and Stripes? No? I thought so. You see my point? You don't annoy the biggest bully of the schoolyard unless you have to. You just smile, or at least grimace in a friendly fashion, and keep building up the store of artillery shells for the moment when everything goes all banana-shaped.

That went on until the Soviet Union, exhausted by continually guarding against a sudden Finnish invasion, broke down and then broke up in 1990. Or something like that. Since then Finns have tried meddling with the European Union, with varying results. At least they haven't outlawed winter clothing as un-Pan-European. At least not yet.

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because of the weather.)

<sup>6</sup>Sorry to possible fans of ruthlessly repressive communist dictatorships if they were offended, but we simply never qualified for their club. Apparently we had bad press.

## Chapter 6

### Do they ever talk?

Most Finnish people seem quiet and withdrawn to foreigners. This is, for a large part, so because Finns are, by nature, quiet and withdrawn. Another facet of the fact is, however, that Finns expect all foreigners to be social and outgoing and talkative. Finns expect that foreigners will come and talk to them, and thus any foreigner who decides to wait until the natives come to him/her is set up to become very lonely indeed.

Finns talk, and even laugh, once they are drawn into conversation, and are considerably less stuck-up than the members of societies with more societal build-up. One less than pleasing part of Finnish social life is the poisonous despising of anyone successful, but the reader needs not worry about being bothered by this since by an ancient tradition a person is criticized only when not present to defend himself or herself.

There are very many very funny Finnish people, and some even make a living out of it, be they professional comedians, writers or politicians. For the first two this funniness is intentional. All you need to do is to mention one of the great names of Finnish humor — Markus Kajo or Pieru Kaasu, for example — to a native, and he'll surely be convulsed by laughter. However, since their humor is quite language-specific, none of their works has been (as far as

the writer knows) translated to any easy and common language, such as English, so the reader'll have to rely on the writer's word: they're very, very funny. Now, didn't that cheer you up?

Then again, Finnish songwriters aren't so cheerful at all. The Finnish tradition runs to mournful tango and to end-embracing heavy metal, and the lyrics are just about as upbeat as the reader'd think. It always rains, only tears move in the darkness, the loved one left never to return, sadness rules and grief reigns, love dies slow and unrequited, there's no money, and even the dog died yesterday.

Learning the Finnish language is horrendously difficult, since — just to give a representative example — nouns can take any of at least twenty different grammatical cases, most of which are riddled with blatantly counterintuitive exceptions. Since this booklet is not intended to depress the reader — there are excellent courses on Finnish for that purpose — the writer writes no more and just mentions one relatively mild inventive Finnish insult in the hope that it proves useful. The reader may, for example, shout it at passing old ladies, thus making himself (herself?) appear quite fluent in Finnish, and youthful to boot.

*Riivatun taulapää sohlo mykiö!*, or 'You cursed dryhead physically unapt person with eye trouble!'

## Chapter 7

# Barbarians on the edge of Europe

Right. Ever heard about the firm Nokia? The one that makes the best cellular phones in the world? A Finnish firm. Ever heard of a little computer-related thingamajic called Linux? Designed by a Finn. Finns are very big on computers and the Internet; again, it's probably because of the long, cold winters.

Come on. Say we're backward. I dare you.<sup>1</sup>

And, ah, in addition to that, Finns apparently are very good at driving weird cars at unsafe speeds (Kimi Räikkönen, Mika Häkkinen) and at ice-skates brawling, also known as hockey.<sup>2</sup>

Also, Finns make very good heavy metal music, but those that like the corpses-and-chains stuff know that already and the others don't care so no more about that.

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<sup>1</sup>Can't hear you! Shout louder! *Louder!*

<sup>2</sup>Not that the writer knows about it; he loathes sport but hopes it doesn't shine through.

## Chapter 8

### Finns themselves

Finns are by nature quiet, asocial, withdrawn, gloomy and insane. Let me illustrate this by giving as an example two loved Finnish aphorisms:

One: *'Itku pitkästä ilosta.'*, which translates as 'Crying out of too long laughing [comes].'

Two: *'Kellä onni on, se onnen kätkeköön.'*, or 'He whom has happiness better hide it.'<sup>1</sup>

Splendid-sounding, right? Don't get this wrong — Finns are the best people there are. At least if you value your solitude and personal peace. Finns don't socialize. Finns don't haggle. Finns don't even *know* about small talk. Finns don't bother with formal niceties. A Finnish man, returning from a war and a thousand dangers is likely to comment to his beloved wife merely this: 'I came back. Any food?'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Third: *'Keinot on monet, sano mummo kun kissalla pöytää pyyhki.'* or 'Oh, the ways, said the granny as she wiped the table with a cat', but this saying isn't as well-known as those two above.

<sup>2</sup>And, shortly after, 'Any drink?' Also, one should notice the typical well-developed Finnish sense of romance and romanticism shown in this example, and the wife's subsequent remark of 'You didn't bring any cabbage with you, did you? We're right out of cabbage, oh my eternal and undying loved one.'

It is also an ancient and still well-kept Finnish tradition to always look at the gloomy side of everything. I got a raise? Oh my, the neighbors will be jealous and not talk to me anymore. Or they'll talk behind my back, which is worse. The day is sunny? Oh my, and I get sunburnt so easily. And the glare is quite blinding, really. And I don't have anything nice enough to wear. The natural comment to anything is 'It'll all end in tears.' Some foreigners find this rather realistic approach to life depressing. I can't figure out why. Oh my, it's probably my fault. They'll talk behind my back about it and laugh at me. Oh my, oh dear oh my.

Finns are stubborn, and some western variants are (or were) more likely to settle arguments with a knife than with some other sharp argument. An axe is, also, a well-known argument almost guaranteed to end any marital or buddyship quarrel. To translate-brutalize the words of a possibly famous Finnish song (*Murheelisten laulujen maa* by Eppu Normaali) descriptive of the Finns' view of themselves, 'unemployment, booze, axe and the family, snowdrift, police and the last mistake.' Finns can be quite homicidal when in the mood — that is, when drunk. That is, regrettably enough, very often. Despite this it must be remembered that Finns are decent, honest, and not treacherous by nature. They'll always give you a fair warning before they hit you with the axe, albeit sometimes the first swing *is* the warning. Finns, especially males, are very prone to get roaring drunk at every opportunity. The only saving grace in this is that the most hopeless drunkards pass out outdoors, then pass away because of the cold, and thus bother the gene pool no more.<sup>3</sup>

Most Finns don't give a whit about higher arts or noble manners. This is, depending on your point of view, either a very good or

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<sup>3</sup>Female Finns have their own specific faults which a faint sense of decorum forbids the writer from discussing. Also, he's still hoping to do some extensive and intimate field research on the matter.

a very bad thing. Many are very suspicious of foreigners and intensely distrust everything they can't understand. Thanks to an educational system that, despite the continued efforts of politicians, is one of the best in the world, Finns are less ignorant than you'd initially think; it's just that they have a brooding-savage mindset coupled to their knowledge of the world. Despite these certain troglodyte tendencies, Finns are, as a rule, quite polite, because, as aptly expressed by the immortal Robert E. Howard, 'civilized men are more discourteous than savages because they know they can be impolite without having their skulls split, as a general thing.'

But don't let that depress you; just don't annoy Finns unnecessarily, especially if they are drunk. Finnish people are nowadays so quiet and polite because all the rude-when-sober ones were axe-murdered centuries ago. The rude-when-drunk ones are safe because their rudity arises only when there's no-one left sober enough to swing an axe and hit anything besides his own foot.

Cheer up!

## Chapter 9

### Sauna

Sauna is basically a room with benches and a stove in it. You throw water on the stove, creating steam, and sit on a bench while the room becomes very hot and humid.

The likelihood of a Finn saying this is something like the possibility of a preacher describing God as 'quite a capable fellow, really. Created some things in his day, I hear.'

To Finns, sauna is a second religion. It is meditation, medication, relaxation, refreshment, reinforcement, cleansing, healing, sacrament, tradition and everyday life.

There are too many variants and nuances of sauna-lore for the writer to discuss here, so he won't. Carpal tunnel syndrome and all that. To shortly describe bathing in the sauna for the first time: while you're doing it you feel like you'd die any minute, and when you're done you feel like you'd just been reborn. It's something like that but even better. One of the beneficent medical aftereffects of sauna-bathing is that it stimulates the blood vessels close to the surface of the skin, thus keeping the bather's skin supple and young-looking.<sup>1</sup> Also, breathing the steamy air is an excellent remedy for many respiratory conditions, the heat kills

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<sup>1</sup>More on this will follow when the writer finds a chance to observe first-hand the effects of bathing on the female of the species.

bacteria, and the sweat cleanses one better than any amount of water and shampoo.

There are many varieties of sauna. An electrically heated sauna is what a foreigner usually experiences in an urban setting: its stove is heated by electricity.<sup>2</sup> The difference between an old-fashioned wood-heated sauna and an electric sauna is similar to the difference between a kiss and a slap on the cheek — sure, both are physical contact, but one is significantly more pleasant. Saunas heated by burning wood in the stove are further divided into saunas with chimneys and smoke saunas. The smoke sauna, the oldest and best of the varieties, has — as one might guess — no chimney, the smoke spiraling out through the stove, filling the bathing-room. Since this is hardly conducive to enjoying the bath, the stove is heated for several hours until its surface-stones almost glow with the heat, and the fire is then allowed to die, and the smoke to dissipate. After that, the supreme and most sublime pleasure known to man, the Finnish smoke sauna, is ready to be enjoyed.<sup>3</sup>

Finns, being their typical selves, have naturally invented several cheerful add-ons to sauna: for example, beating themselves with bundles of birch twigs while in that temperature of 100 degrees Celsius (212 Fahrenheit, Americans), and rolling around in snow naked outside when having a break from the twigs. And, if there's a lake nearby, swimming in it. If it's winter, one of course has to saw off a chunk of ice first, but that's no hindrance.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>As you probably guessed from the name, right?

<sup>3</sup>Those that wish to learn more about saunas may approach the writer, who will tell them that he is too busy at the moment, promise to call back, and then promptly forget about it. Alternatively, one might approach some official personage (for exchange students, the various international-tutoring-cretins are a good choice) and demand to be initiated into the Finnish Sublime Society of Smoke Sauna Bathees. (FSSSSB, and I dare you to say that quick without hissing.)

<sup>4</sup>No kidding. This is all true. It's horrible, but it's all true.

And, since you probably wonder: Yes, Finns enjoy doing these things. They look forward to doing them. They love them. They're far too common to be attributed solely to wanting to shock foreigners. It's a very nation-specific thing. You'd have to do it to understand.

Or maybe all Finns just are insane. That's a possibility too, with these winters.

## Chapter 10

### An afterthought

The reader should note that of the various ancient 'tribes' of Finns the writer belongs to the Savonians or the inhabitants of Savo, who are known to be utterly incapable of even telling the time without any convolutions but still unwilling to lie. Or, as the anecdote goes:

A man, visiting the Finnish province of Savo, walked by a farmstead and, not having a watch with him<sup>1</sup>, asked the man standing in the yard for the time. 'Well', replied the Savonian, 'so it seems to me that the hour is quite much the same it was yesterday at this time too. Or, if you so prefer, quite the same 'twill be tomorrow in this moment as well.'

Garrulous, indecipherable, and so crooked he appears almost upright. That, dear reader, is the essence of the writer's character, and the character of this introduction.

Goodbye, sleep well, and don't mind the wolf behind the window. I mean, the big dog. Big, friendly dog. It drools because it likes you. Don't worry. Cheer up!

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<sup>1</sup>He was probably robbed by the knife-wielding Bothnians, who are another Finnish tribe, but that's not important here.