

Words to be Shared

We have all attended functions where we've listened to a speech by a particularly dynamic or entertaining presenter who shared anecdotes, information and insights that we later wish we could recall. Following are two speeches— one recent and one memorable one from an IDDD celebration years ago. Excerpts of these speeches appeared in our December 2012/January 2013 FFSC Newsletter.

In August, Dr. Greg Jacobs, PhD Emeritus Professor, PSU, author of "Fundamentals of Grammar and Writing" and "Fin, Finns and Astorians" spoke at the 52nd annual United Finnish Kaleva Brothers and Sisters Grand Lodge Convention in Portland.

It is indeed an honor to be the guest speaker this evening in celebration of the 52nd convention of the Grand Lodge, and I wish to thank Bob Waine for asking me if I would like to speak on this occasion. Last December I spoke at the Astoria Lodge's 125 th anniversary. Even though my last name is Jacob, I do have some Finnish roots on my mother's side. Dorothy Luoma, was born in Svenson and raised by her grandmother Lillian, who was born in Oulu, Finland. Finnish to me as a young boy on the farm in Svenson was *paha poika* and *paska housut* and *voi, voi, sentään, minne vesi kannetaan*. We grew up in the west end of town where most of the Finns lived, and our mailman, whose name was Willie, was Chinese. Willie delivered our mail for thirty years, and there were so many Finns living on his route in Union Town, he taught himself Finnish. He loved to speak Finnish to my mom, and once I heard him say, "Dorothy, it's a cold day in hell when a Chinaman speaks better Finn than you do."

"Moments in the Life of the Grand Lodge"

The Grand Lodge was established in 1900, but before I talk about it, let me say a few words about the Astoria Lodge, established fourteen years earlier in 1886. As many of you know there was a sizable Finnish community by the 1880s, but there were few opportunities for social and civic activities, other than the boarding houses and the saloon business. Rough and hardy Astoria did have 54 saloons and 35 brothels in 1890. The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Finnish Temperance Society, both established in 1883, did provide some cultural activities, but the Finnish people "sensed the value of an organization which would serve the needs of the tightly-knit group of immigrants, that would offer some material guarantees and cultural activities in keeping with the customs of their own people" (from the History of Astoria Lodge #2, 1937). The first meeting of the Finnish Brotherhood in Astoria had 50 charter members, and their by-law states that the purpose of the lodge is to help the sick and needy members, to provide for burial for deceased members, and to promote and enhance the reputation of the members and of the Finns in general. [December 6, 1886 reveals that \$412.50 was in the lodge's treasury. Charles Larson was president; Jacob Moore, vice president; Walter Helmstrom, secretary; Emanuel Maunula, treasurer.]

The initiation fee was \$10.00 and the monthly dues were \$1.00. Sick benefits were to be \$1.00 for the first week and \$9.00 per week for a maximum of 30 weeks per calendar year. One had to be a member for six months before benefits could apply. By 1890 membership had risen to 198 members. In 1892 the Finnish Brotherhood extended a helping hand to Finland during the winter famine by collecting money to send flour to Finland on behalf of the US government. The Brotherhood also promoted athletic and social events, partly as an incentive for young men to join the lodge. For New Year's Eve programs the lodge sent invitations to the young Finnish ladies, thereby putting "pressure on a young man to hurriedly seek membership and social acceptance." How tragic would it be if a young man lost his lady love to another at the New Year's Eve program because he failed to make an appearance.

The first Finnish brotherhood lodge was originated in San Francisco on January 4, 1882, the "Suomalainen Veljeyssseura." Later in the year the name changed to "United California Finnish Brotherhood, San Francisco Lodge N. 1." Like Astoria Lodge No. 2, the organizers were motivated by a desire to arrange for funeral benefits and sickness expenses for Finnish immigrants. In the year 1900 there were four lodges: San Fran, Astoria, Fort Bragg (1896), and Eureka (1899). On November 15, 1900 these lodges met in San Francisco to discuss affiliation through a central organization. It was not a smooth start because the San Francisco and Astoria lodges based their foundation on the Bible, but the Fort Bragg (1896) and Eureka (1899) based theirs on the Kalevala. After two days of negotiation, the four lodges could not come to an agreement. The Fort Bragg and Eureka delegates departed for home, but the SF and Astoria lodges on November 17, 1900 in the Winchester Hotel agreed to form a grand lodge called United Finnish Brotherhoods Throughout the World (Yhdistyneet Suomalaiset Veljeysseurat Ylimailman). Conventions were to be held every 2nd year on the anniversary date of the organization. Fred Wickman was chosen to be the chairman, P.G. Sundberg the vice-chairman and John Toikka, secretary. The first four conventions were held in Astoria in 1902 and 1906 and in Seattle in 1904 and 1908. Thirty-two delegates representing 11 lodges attended the 1906 Grand Lodge convention, and in 1908 there was discussion about purchasing 180 acres near Woodburn, Oregon for "Oma Koti," a home for aged members unable to provide for themselves. It was an issue of dispute for ten years before being sold in 1918.

As for Portland, Oregon, in 1890 there were enough Finns to organize "Tyyni Valo," a chapter of the Finnish Society Brotherhood with headquarters in Ishpeming, Michigan. Twenty members joined that year, and the purpose was "to shield and prevent our countrymen from sinking into alcoholism," to be wary of the notorious Finnish Erickson's Bar. On the contrary, I can't help but think

of the quote I used in my book: “too much cannot be said of the steady thrift and perseverance of these people. Idleness to them is unknown. They are wide-awake, sober, and intelligent” (Col R Fishermen’s Protective Assoc).

I should mention that in 1892 Finnish women in the San Fran bay area formed their own Sisterhood “Kointähti” (morning star), and in 1894 a group of women in Astoria formed the sisterhood lodge and named it Toivon Lädhe, Fountain of Hope. They based their charter on the same principles as the Brotherhood Lodge and became well known in the community for their planning of social events and annual programs. Eventually Kointähti merged with the San Fran Lodge a few years later, but it took the Toivon Lädhe twenty years to merge with the Astoria Lodge. It wasn’t easy for the Astoria Brotherhood Lodge to convince the skeptical Sisterhood Lodge that they would be received as equals. For years both parties worked on unification, and on January 17, 1917, 64 members of the Sisterhood were initiated into the Astoria Lodge. “Each Sisterhood member shall have the privilege of paying the same dues she has paid in her lodge, namely, 50 cents a month, and the same rights and privileges as the Brotherhood members. A Sister paying 50 cents a month dues shall receive sickness benefits of \$5 per week and \$80 for funeral benefits.”

The 1912 meeting in San Francisco lasted nine days and was labeled a “talkfest.” Much of the discussion had to do with a merger with the Kalevala Lodges and a resultant revision of the constitution and by-laws. A new name was created that year—United Finnish Kaleva Brothers and Sisters. The 1914 convention in Astoria was notable for a prolonged argument whether liquor dealers and bartenders could join the Brotherhood. Five years later the SF lodge was expelled because it refused to remove a member involved in the liquor business. Since then there have been failed efforts to entice the SF Lodge to re-affiliate with the U.F.K.B.&S.

During World War I members of the Grand Lodge and the Astoria Lodge began to investigate the possibility of opening a lodge in Portland, especially since the high wages paid in the ship-building industry attracted Finnish people to the city. The goal came to fruition when 18 members established the Portland Lodge No. 23 on April 17, 1917. Chairman was Matt Johansen, Vice-chairman William Lindberg, and Secretary Charles Williams. The meetings were held in an upstairs room on Mississippi Avenue. Income for the first year was \$398.42. A year later the Bureau of Naturalization, Wash DC wanted the lodge to reveal its purpose, operation, and names of its members. Then secretary Charles Williams refused to do so and resigned. Gust Alama was elected to replace him.

In 1919 the Grand Lodge convention was held in Portland, and one topic was whether the newsletter Veljeys-vesti, the Message of Brotherhood, (started in 1916) should be published monthly or quarterly. The delegates voted to publish it semi-annually. However, things did not work out as hoped, and it took nine years before Richard Wirkkunen was elected editor of the “revived” publication of Veljeys-vesti (eventually to be published monthly), and in 1925 the Toveri Press of Astoria printed 28 pages of this new issue. Another action item at the 1919 convention added a by-law forbidding any member to work where a strike has been declared. A strike was termed legal when 51% of the workers voted to strike.

The 1924 convention in Seattle was notable because the delegates voted to revise the bylaws, adopted rules that brought the local lodges and the Grand Lodge into better conformity, and equalized the dues paid by members in various lodges. The 1920s were a time of growth for the Portland Lodge, and the Lodge’s programs ranged from lectures on health topics to the recitation of poetry. A program in 1930 raised many eyebrows when the editor of the Astoria paper Toveri highlighted the working class movement from a communist perspective and even criticized the Finnish government. Politics continued when the Workers’ Club of Portland charged that the Portland Lodge was pro white and supportive of the conservative Finnish government. In 1932 the Lodge no longer could use the hall of the Workers’ Club for its meetings, so the Polish Hall on Interstate and Failing Streets became the new meeting place. That year Lodge No. 23 had 237 members.

At the 15th Grand Lodge convention held in Eureka, CA in 1934 the delegates decided to publish a Finnish history of the lodges and the Grand Lodge. A contract was made with the Finnish Daily Pub Co of Duluth, MN for 2500 copies. The job was completed in 1937. Richard Wirkkunen chronicled the first 36 years of the Grand Lodge, and John Toikka wrote a chapter called “Reminiscences on the Beginnings of Our Brotherhood Alliance.” The convention also invited youth groups from Astoria, Fort Bragg, Eureka, Winlock, Reedley, Berkeley, Seattle, and Portland. The youth theme on how to promote and attract juniors in lodge activities was dominant at the 1938 convention hosted by the Portland Lodge.

The next convention in 1940 at Berkeley, CA centered on gathering relief supplies and funds for the people of Finland. Many letters that appeared in the Veljeys-vesti were hostile toward the Soviet Union, and these letters were an issue of concern because tone of these letters violated the sections of the Grand Lodge constitution that called for neutrality in politics and religion. Brother Paul Thompson was once again chosen editor of the Veljeys-vesti. After Paul Thompson’s death in 1941, Richard Wirkkunen took over as editor in 1942.

Fifty-one delegates from 18 lodges attended the 20th convention of the Grand Lodge in Winlock, Washington in 1948. The Youth Committee reported on its activities, and the delegates added an amendment to the by-laws on establishing procedures for Grand Lodge officers who are derelict in their duties. Evidently Richard Wirkkunen did not fulfill his duties as Secretary for two years. Also a resolution was passed to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Grand Lodge in 1950, and Berkeley was picked to be the place for the

observance. All brothers and sisters who had been members of lodges for 50 years or more were invited as special guests and presented with gold 50-year buttons for brothers and pins for sisters. The Grand Lodge sponsored a membership drive, and in 1952 at the Fort Bragg convention, the winning lodges were Berkeley with 93 new members, Astoria was second with 67, and Portland third with 53.

The same year, 1950, the Portland Lodge submitted a proposal for a three-year lease of the Finn Hall on Fremont and Montana Streets. Rent was \$70 a month. The membership approved the lease and the move was made March 15. With hard work the new hall was ready for the Lodge's 33rd anniversary, April 1, 1950. 400 people attended the program and dance. In 1955 the Brotherhood returned to Polish Hall at 3832 N. Interstate Ave.

In 1954 the city of Vancouver, BC got to host the 23rd convention of the Grand Lodge, attended by 55 delegates from 16 lodges. The secretary reported that membership in the lodges totaled 2604. Delegates voted to publish the *Veljeys-viesti* in two languages, and for the first time the minutes were published in English only. [I'd like to read one paragraph from the 1960 issue.] Four years later Berkeley Lodge hosted with 69 delegates in attendance. They represented 17 lodges. Alvin Salo took over as President. Delegates urged all lodges to prepare English-language histories of their histories to be kept in the Grand Lodge archives. For the first time a sister member, Helmi Steph of Winlock, WA became secretary.

In 1964 Seattle hosted the 28th convention and that same year the Grand Lodge arranged a Finland tour, which required two 90-passenger planes, and the Astoria lodge elected a woman president, Nancy Mattila, the first time ever. In 1967 the Portland Lodge celebrated its 50th anniversary. Martha Johnson, the remaining charter member, related her pride in the lodge's achievements over the years. In 1969, following the death of Frank Leskela, editor of *Veljeys-viesti*, Irma Hummasti assumed the position of editor, as well as Grand Lodge secretary. Frank Leskela had joined the Portland Lodge Youth Group as a teen-ager, served as the Portland Lodge's secretary, and edited the newsletter for 10 years. At the 32nd convention in 1972 Ellen Huld of the Portland Lodge became the first woman to be elected President of the Grand Lodge.

At the Aberdeen Convention in 1970 Irma Hummasti, Secretary, read a letter from the Vancouver Lodge requesting its withdrawal from the Grand Lodge. At least 30 members wanted to remain with the Grand Lodge, and for the next several years officers of the Grand Lodge and the Vancouver opposition group, the Finlandia Club, carried on a legal battle. After prolonged court action and counter suits, The Grand Lodge was finally incorporated in British Columbia in 1975, and it could then issue a new charter to those former members of Vancouver Lodge No. 28 who remained loyal to U.F.K.B.&S. These members were now associated with Lodge No. 34.

The Astoria Lodge celebrated its 85th anniversary in 1971. Colonel Delbert Bjork, who received Finland's Order of the White Rose in 1967, was the guest speaker. Astoria hosted the Diamond Jubilee (75th) of the Grand Lodge from November 15 through the 17th. Lodge members presented a three-act Finnish play [Katupeilin Takana](#) (Behind the Street Mirror). Grand Lodge President Ed Hagelberg presented an address and a Bicentennial salute to the United States. On the last day a banquet was held at Suomi Hall, and the guest speaker was Finnish Consul General Veikko O. Huttunen.

Work continued on the goal of printing all lodge histories, and much credit should go to President Ed Hagelberg (1972-76) for his strong promotion of the project. At the Grand Lodge convention in Berkeley in 1978, David Johnson, Lea Helin, and Helen Johnson, were appointed as a permanent Grand Lodge History Committee. Each lodge was also advised to appoint a history committee. In 1982 at the convention in Astoria, Miriam Helenius of the Portland Lodge was added to the history committee.

The Astoria Lodge celebrated its 100th anniversary in November of 1986. In attendance was the Portland Finnish Choir. The evening program presented a historical sketch of the lives of the Finnish immigrants and their early struggles to find protection and security. Included in the sketch were poems, dances, and group songs. The author and director of the production was sister Kyllikki Ylipelto. A synopsis of the sketch was available in English. A video is available in the Heritage Museum. Mayor Bob Chopping gave a commemorative plaque from the City of Astoria to the lodge.

The 100th Anniversary of the Grand Lodge in the year 2000 was held in Portland, Oregon at the Oxford Suites at Jantzen Beach. The banquet took place at the Quay in Vancouver. Tom Turner of the Portland Lodge was the Grand Lodge President.

For 112 years now the Grand Lodge has promoted fellowship among the Finnish community; provided scholarships to needy students; assisted its member lodges, both financially and culturally; performed benevolent acts for its members; and has offered succor and aid to those in need. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be a part of joyous and memorable occasion. It has been an honor to speak to you tonight.

During his address to the attendees of the 1985 FFSC Independence Day Dinner and Dance, E. Norman Westerberg spoke eloquently on the history, spirit and accomplishments of Finns. At the time, Norman was Honorary Consul for Finland in Washington State — a position he held for many years. He continues to be an active participant in the organizational life of the local Finnish community and in Nordic Heritage Museum. His work on behalf of Finland has been acknowledged by many honors, including being named Commander of the Order of the Lion.

*****Separate scanned attachments**