

# In the land of thousand lakes with a kayak.

By Jakub Djament a.k.a. Janek Drobot

## Part I. On the road to Finland

Nowy Dziennik, Sunday, September 12, 1937

Where to go? That's the question you ask yourself when you have your own mode of transportation – a kayak, your own villa on wheels – a tent, when you are itching to roam, when you are fed-up with the noise of a big city, and when you have a lot of time and a lot of imagination, but very little cash. After looking at the maps and gathering a lot of information, but guided mainly by the fascination with the North, I choose Finland. There will be no shortage of water for a kayak in that place. Even a cursory glance at an altogether not a very accurate map convinces one not to worry about a possibility of anything like that ever happening. The map of this land is dotted with blue splashes – the lakes of all sizes, all connected by a web of black lines – the rivers. The land is awash on the south by the bay of Finland, on the west by the bay of Bothnia, on the north by the Arctic Ocean, and it beacons me to become a water vagabond. The call is so strong and the vision so promising that I cannot be dissuaded from the trip even by the city passport office. Procuring an “economy” passport (one day of its validity costs three zloty, i.e., the cost of two day's worth of travel by kayak), officially priced at “reduced rate”, undoubtedly because it reduces the content of one's pocket, was quite a sporting achievement, but at the same time, an excellent, if quite exhausting, training for the upcoming travel. To obtain this passport one needs not only an application, various attachments, and – of course – the fee, but one must also demonstrate a considerable ability to run (from office to office, and from one window to another), to swim (in one's own sweat), and in general be in an excellent physical shape to survive the whole process and obtain this precious booklet.

Having secured this document, and having obtained in Warsaw the necessary visas, I commence the travel to Finland by train and by ship. The train passes the border town Zemgale, and after traveling through a flat and monotonous Latvian landscape, arrives directly in Riga.

It is a city of Northern character, removed somewhat from the main seafaring lanes, and it gives an impression of being too large for the life contained therein. One can walk through the streets in the middle of the day and not meet a single human, and the lack of chatter emanating from the open windows makes one wonder if it is inhabited at all. It is already here that the charm of the Northern serenity begins. The infrequent passersby do not show a slightest sign of the big-city nervousness, the cars are forbidden by law to use the horn (as is the case in the rest of the North), and must slow down and stop for the pedestrians, rather than scatter the careless ones with their blare. No one is in any rush, everyone seems to have a lot of time, and one only wanders what is the purpose of all the

clocks, located on every other building in town, which, with their large faces, provide everyone with seemingly useless information as to the current hour and minute.

This is not, however, the true peacefulness of the North. It has also a lot of imposed artificiality. The Latvian government is an authoritarian one, and one does not know how much of this calmness is natural and how much is imposed by the authorities to ensure the peace. The immobile figures of the majestic monument to the freedom and liberation of Latvia, located in the main part of town, are very much at odds with live, but fearful face of the gendarme, standing ramrod-straight on the balcony on the second floor of the palace of the dictator Ulmanis. This monument itself is indeed at odds with the suppression of the national minorities, and with the abridgement of the civil liberties of the citizens. In addition, I have a personal grudge with the current political regime of Latvia: On the return journey, on the Latvian-Estonian border, the Latvian guards confiscated from me a genuine Finnish tourist knife, which served me well throughout the trip, but which is not allowed in Latvia because of the current martial law. The dictatorship is afraid of everything: It loudly proclaims that it is strong and invincible, but is afraid of a plain knife, bought in democratic Finland by an innocent tourist. One can smell danger everywhere. The Riga policeman, when asked in German for directions to the Polish Union, immediately recognized a foreigner and instead of replying, demanded in a polite but stern voice to see the passport. After scrupulous examination of that document, and after assuring himself that I do not pose a danger to the state, he finally shows me the way. The Polish and Jewish minorities are fairly sizable here, at three and a half percent of the former and 5.2 percent for the later, but they do not fare well. The national minorities are not shown much tolerance: In all the authoritarian countries such tolerance was abandoned long time ago and Latvia is not an exception.

The atmosphere in the city is somewhat grim, one could say depressing. This is not the tranquility of Helsinki, resulting from the well-being and contentment of its citizens. The Latvians are proud of their clean streets, but the cleanliness is not the result of the high civic culture, but rather it is due to draconian fines imposed on the populace for littering. People are speaking in half-whispers and are very restrained, to the point of appearing rude, in their conversations with strangers, especially with the foreigners. My guide to the city was a student from the University of Riga and I inquired with him several times about the political situation in Latvia. In each instance he discretely changes the topic of conversation – depending on the type and the circumstance of the inquiry. He lets me know in a discrete way, using gestures and half completed sentences, that he is not at ease discussing the subject. From the time of that memorable night of 15/16 May 1934, when the current dictator Ulmanis carried out takeover of the government and dissolved all Latvian political parties, the political conversations in Latvia are very awkward. One of the victims of this coup d'état was the Polish National Union, the main Polish organization in Latvia.

A tourist, looking for some freedom of movement and action, cannot possibly feel comfortable in a country in which the oppression is intermingled with poverty. Let's get out of here fast. The longer stay would put us in a depressed mood. The Latvians bid us a farewell full of ritual, in the form of a very strict custom inspection on the border, but

with no tangible results. After several hours on the train we arrive in Tallinn, the capitol of a second Baltic state – Estonia. The atmosphere here changes considerably for the better. After leaving the train station, the first sight one sees is a charming view of the Castle Hill, where the Estonian government buildings are located, surrounded by the picturesque gardens and old fortification walls with cylinder-like turrets. Tallinn, called the crown jewel by Tsar Nicholas II, is today one of the most beautiful cities of the North. Castle Hill, surrounded by almost vertical walls and accessible only by steep and narrow stairs, forms, like the rest of the town, a labyrinth of narrow and twisted streets and cul-de-sacs, where a compass is the only means of figuring out the direction. The old medieval quarters peacefully coexist with the bustle of a capitol metropolis. An early morning walk transforms one to the medieval times. One expects any minute to encounter a halberdier with a lance, or a knight in full body armor and a helmet. One is only reminded of the reality that this is a modern city by an occasional passer-by, dressed in a jacket and a pair of pants, or by a seldom encountered an electric or gas street light.

In spite of the medieval character of the city one feels much freer here than in Riga. The local populace here already exhibits the friendliness and goodwill, the common Northern traits which we so often encountered later on in Finland. The Estonians seem to be a bit more nervous and jumpy in their movements, as compared to the Finns from further north, and their language, while very close to Finish, sounds as it were faster and its words were shorter. It was explained to me later on by a Finish friend: “The difference between the Estonian Language and ours is that, for example, the Estonians call their capitol Tallinn and we call it Tallinna; we have more time so we add more letter.” The passersby, even when not asked, are generous with all sort of information, and readily reply to even most thorny – by Riga’s standards – questions. They are proud of their democracy and their tolerance of national minorities (0.4% of Jews).

But we hurry on. Relatively late date (the two-month long polar day ends in Finish Lapland on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July) urges us to go north. We sail on an Estonian ship “Aegna” across the Finish Bay to Helsinki. The ship is destined for Finland, but because of the mildly wavy sea many of the passengers are bound for Riga (Translator’s note: OK, the original is not translatable into English. The situation is this: The word “Riga” in Polish denotes the capitol of Latvia; it is also extremely close to the word “rzyga”, which means to “throw up.” So what Janek is basically saying that the ship was going to Finland but many passengers were throwing up on the way – going to Riga, so to say in Polish.) This was particularly true of the – appropriately named for the occasion – weaker sex. Reclining in the deck-chairs in almost horizontal position, like fainted sheep of all sizes and ages, they would occasionally lean overboard in the direction of Riga. (Translator’s note: see the comment above.) A very sorry view indeed. How can the fish survive?

We finally arrive by the shores of Suomi. This is the name of Finland in her own language. One can already see Helsinki – “the white city of the North”, as well as a plethora of small and large islands made of shiny red granite and completely polished by the pounding of the waves. In short order we are surrounded by a swarm of motorboats and sailboats with proudly protruding sails, surrounding our ship like puppies. We are approaching the domes of the St. Nicholas church, and we dock in the very center of the

city. In no time we complete the immigration and customs inspection. A chubby custom inspector, with a friendly and good-natured face, was quite amused at our collapsible equipment and our backpacks, and was practically offended when I offered to open the kayak and the packs for the inspection. Without being asked, he offered us the directions to the local tourist office, gave us some addresses of hotels and tourist hostels, wished us “good wind and good water”, and left our baggage untouched. Within half-hour of our arrival all the immigration and custom formalities were completed, and the portable inspection station was folded up and removed from the scene, as if the Finns were embarrassed by all these proceedings. The new arrivals are given complete freedom of movement, they can go wherever they wish, and if anyone is appearing to watch us, it is only with the intention of offering help. The democratic Finland can't stand the formalities and the control.

Part II. In the land of thousand lakes with a kayak.  
Nowy Dziennik, Thursday, September 16, 1937

The water deity Vedenhaltia, according to the mythology and the beliefs of ancient Finns, was a personification of the soul of nature, and played an important, if not a deciding role, in the creation of human life and of their land. Perhaps nowhere in the world is there such a cult – almost religious one could say – of water, such a union between the humanity and the water, as it exists in Finland. Water is the source of all that is good, Finns commune with water from the time they get up in the morning until the last thing they do at night, water unites the provinces of the country, water gives an employment, and bread (and fish) to the people. Even the heavy iron comes in Finland from water: the rich pilings of iron ore, deposited on the shores of rivers and lakes by the mother-water constitute an important source of raw material for the nation's industry, powered mainly by water, incidentally, while the more traditional, land based iron mines are less profitable and are often abandoned. Perhaps the reason that the daily struggle for money in Finland is without any trace of brutality can be explained by the fact that there is enough water for everyone. Water is health – thus the Finns are healthy as fish, water is an absolute equality – thus the Finns are democrats not only by their Constitution but actually by nature, water is peace – thus there are no choleric Finns anywhere, water is cleanliness in all the meaning of the word: cleanliness of body, hands (even in politics), honesty, straightforwardness, and truthfulness. [Translator's note: *This last sentence doesn't make sense in Polish either.*]

Perhaps the reason that the people in Helsinki are so content with their lives is that they are surrounded by water on three sides. 290 thousand inhabitants show such a dynamic attraction toward the sea that surrounds them, that the ships arrive practically in the heart of the city. One has an impression that the city begins all of a sudden; there is no transition between the asphalt and the water. One is tempted to dive into the port basin to check if by chance there is a human life underneath. The city seems to extend itself out over the water: in the port, right by the water basin, in fact over the basin itself, the

traders are selling vegetables and fish in the stalls that are tied to the moored boats. Even the boats further out from the shore engage in this trade, and they have no problem attracting the customers.

In Finland, a country of the same area as Poland, 11 percent of land is taken up by the lakes; the number of islands in the sea and on the lakes reaches thirty thousand, and the shoreline comprises 35 percent of the total borders. Thus there is enough water for her three and a half million inhabitants (one tenth of the Poland's population). There is plenty of water, thus there is plenty of everything. Everyone has a right to a good life, unemployment and emigration are unknown here, and beggars are unheard of. The standard of living for a manual laborer is higher here than the standard of a skilled laborer and often of an intellectual in Poland. There is no conspicuous consumption, but there is prosperity. And perhaps that why there are no thieves. Why steal when everything is so easy within one's reach? In all of Helsinki – and as I found out later – in all of Finland there is literally no store with iron shutters or any other such security contraptions. Even the jewelry stores are locked up with ordinary lock, and only in order to let the public know that, unfortunately, there is no one inside to serve the clients. They are not locked because of the thieves. The word “varras” (thief) is probably least used in the Finnish language. We asked a woman acquaintance in the middle of Finland if there are “varras” in the neighborhood. She reacted in horror and disbelief, like one would in our country if asked at high noon, in the middle of the city, whether there are murderers in one's family. No one guards anything; everything lies about out in the open. There is an anecdote about an American tourist who wanted to test the honesty of the Northern people in a small northern Finnish town. He inconspicuously left a golden ring on the lip of the well in the middle of the town, rented a room with the view of the well and observed what happens to the ring. After three days of unsuccessful vigil to spot a thief, the tourist gets a tongue-in-cheek message from the mayor of the town, asking to remove the ring so it will not accidentally fall into the well, and cause problems with its retrieval.

The largest department store in Helsinki, Stockman, is a gigantic six stories high building, occupying the entire block in the city center. You can wonder freely in this structure, look at everything you heart desires, and you will not be confronted in your wandering by any sales clerks. It is a complete self service. If you finally want to buy something the clerk appears at your side, he is polite and offers all sort of useful information. There is none of the “I kiss your hands” or “your lowly and faithful servant” fake servitude, but instead a quiet and solid proficiency. In the south of Finland honesty is the result of deeply ingrained people's psychology, in the far north it is a primary requirement for the social order. The population density in the interior Finland is on the average 3 people per square kilometer, which is one tenth of the density of the most sparsely populated Polish province Poleska . The necessity of guarding everything in such wide open regions would require so much effort and time, that the Finns would not have any time or strength to satisfy even the most basic needs, and achieving any kind of prosperity would be completely out of question.

In order to create such a condition of the society one needs a mutual trust and collaboration, and one must assure the equality for all the citizens. Finn is not a democrat

by conviction. He is a democrat by birth. Equality under the law is something completely natural and self-evident, like the freedom of a fish to swim in a lake. Political science teaches us that the modern state comprises of three elements: the land, the inhabitants, and the government. In Finland there is also water. One could say that Finland is a chemical solution of land in water, of people in the territory and time, and of the government in the populace. Just as hard figuring out where the life ends on land and begins in the water, as it is in figuring out where the government ends and where the obedience begins. Everything is permitted. The policemen's job is to allow and not to forbid. The guardian of peace that stands at the intersection, with impeccable white gloves, shows the way to passing vehicles with such a grace, as if he were wishing "a happy journey." He is in no hurry, since no one is in a hurry. If he is talking to a foreigner and does not know a common language very well, he will patiently stand with the guest for half an hour or more, until he figures out what the problem is and then utters few words in reply. Perhaps in no other civilized country do people have more time than they have here. Even the Finnish language is constructed in such a way that the only people who can use it are those not in a hurry. Almost every word has so many double consonants and so many long vowels that one can easily form two words from the same set of letters, only using these singly.

Tranquility, freedom, and lack of any kind of coercion are the elements that form the atmosphere of Helsinki. The railroad station, designed by one of the most distinguished architects in the world –Elieli Saarinen – looks like a museum of serenity, in contrast to all other such edifices throughout the world, where they project a certain nervous urgency, fear of being late and of unrest, and where they are but a place of temporary visit, which one leaves as soon as possible. The parliament building that looms in a distance, with its fourteen majestic columns and exquisite interior furnishings, properly belongs to the society which can govern itself so well.

The hostel, in which I stay, is a beehive, or perhaps a League of Nations, of activity. Various nationalities communicate with each other in various languages, more often than not in the sign language, which they all speak without an accent. There are Swedes and Norwegians, not very popular, because of their behavior and attitude Germans, Britts, who are welcomed with open arms and who have a disposition quite similar to the Finns, Estonians, and most of all Czechs. People travel by all sort of means: by foot (it is well known: *qui kobytkam non habet, piechotare debet*), quite often by kayak, and, using the generosity of the locals, by car.

[Translator's notes (two). *First of all "qui kobytkam non habet, piechotare debet" is a bit of Polish-Latin contraption, I have no idea if Janek made it up, or was it a popular saying in Poland in those times. Translating literally into English it reads: "He who does not have a donkey, travels by foot" The cuteness is in the fact that "qui . . . non habet" is in Latin and "kobytkam" (donkey, or actually an old cow) is in Polish. The whole thing is completely untranslatable into English: too many languages involved, Polish, Latin, Englis. But I hope you get the gist. Nothing like killing a joke.*

*The second comment refers to the next passage. What basically follows is a description of hitchhiking. I don't think that institution existed in Poland in those days (1937). In fact in 1959, when I graduated from high school, a group of us went on a trip and we were going to hitchhike. It is called "autostop" in Polish. Stefan was completely fascinated, he kept telling me that he has done it once in Finland, and how great it was, and was itching to go with us, but looking back, it was quite clear that he has never done it in Poland, so I assume the concept did not exist in Poland in these days. That's why the description is so long. At least that's what I think.]*

Czechs excel in this mode of transportation. The situation is as follows: Two Czechs want to travel from Helsinki to Petsamo on the Arctic Ocean, say. Not a big deal, it's only 1500 kilometers. They go to the road leading north and stop the first private car they see which goes in "their direction." The conversation between the occupants of the vehicle and the Czechs results in Czechs joining the passengers, and the car and the conversation inside continues to roll on. Such a "sport" is very popular in Czechoslovakia, or perhaps among the Czechs world over, and they call it "tramping." Various records are established in this field: Two thousand kilometers in one car, "takeover" of a car with one normal passenger by eight "trampers", 180 degree change in the original destination to suit the interlopers, etc. It is clear that Finland is a heaven for these Czech vagabonds. They become spoiled rotten: one student told me in Prague that he refuses to travel in any car except Citroen. "Other makes are not my style" he told me with a grimace.

While in the hostel, I finalize further travel plans, using the information gathered from the Finnish Academic Sporting Society and from the Finnish Tourist Bureau. Acting on advice of the famous kayaker, Ape Junhunen, who was the first Finn to visit the Lapland, and who was leading the Finnish national kayaking team to the Berlin Olympics, I decide to set the settlement of Hetta by Enontaiko, on the lake Ounas, located almost on the 68<sup>th</sup> latitude, as the northern-most point of our expedition.

[Translator's note. *Well, that what Janek writes. Somehow or other, however, I have my doubts that Mr. Ape Junhunen was one of the first Finns to visit Lapland. Maybe his ancestor sometime in the 10<sup>th</sup> century was the first one, but not Mr. Ape Junhunen in 1930's. But let's give Janek a bit of poetic license.*]

At first I tried to take a bus (kayaking there is impossible) to reach Petsamo, the furthest northern town in Finland, and from there go to the Norwegian settlement Nordkap, which is the northern-most town in Europe and is about 50 kilometers away. But I decided it was a pure snobbism. Traveling in a comfortable bus, on a smooth highway, to the point where the highway ends and there is no possibility of further journey (even with a kayak) does not present any challenge, except the fact that the entrance to Nordkap costs two Norwegian crowns, i.e. about 2 and a half Polish zlotys. The only satisfaction I would get is that I could buy a plaque for my car, which I don't have, with a painted polar bear and a sign "Ocean Glaciale, Petsamo", and that I could take photos of the local Laplanders in their native dresses with their reindeer, all hanging

around the highway. All this would cost me 10 Finnish marks, with no reduced rates for the students.

Instead I decide to explore the true Lapland in the northwestern part of Finland, where the cars don't travel, and where one travels by one's wits, especially since Ape Jnhunen is also going in that direction with four of his friends. We make plans to meet in one week's time in Kajaani on the river Oulujarvi in the middle of Finland. Until that time we slowly travel north, beginning our water journey in Lahti.

Part III. In the Middle Finland  
Nowy Dziennik, Monday, September 20, 1937

As the train for Lahti does not depart for another three hours, I can indulge in the pleasure of taking another leisurely walk through the streets of Helsinki. With a lot of time to spare, I accidentally discover an inconspicuously looking shop, proudly displaying a Hebrew sign: "Kosher." I thus sense some Jews. I step inside, and I am greeted by a friendly butcher proprietor, whom I forewarn that I have intention to buy anything, I am here only to do an interview. How many Jews are there in Finland? How are they doing? How do they make a living? How do the Finns view the Jews and conversely?

In the entire Finland there are about seventeen hundred Jews, living mostly in the south. The small number here as well as in the other Nordic countries is the result of the fact that the path of Jewish emigration never took a northern direction. It's too bad. Because those that ended up there, surely have no regrets. One cannot say that the Finnish Jews enjoy the tolerance of the society; in a country as thoroughly democratic as Finland, one cannot speak of tolerance. The word "tolerance" has a connotation and implies a certain difference, a superiority and/or inferiority of certain social groups or nationalities. If one is a citizen of Finland, one is such a citizen one hundred percent, and one does not ask for any tolerance. Jews enjoy the same freedoms as the other citizens. They can study (even in November), they can hold government offices, can engage in commerce – most of the Jewish traders are in the textile business – without any mention of exploiting middlemen. There is no judeo-commune, foreign agents, freemasonry, national front, and the corresponding disasters, catastrophes, and calamities.

[Translators note: *The word "judeo-commune" causes an error to appear in the Word spelling check. Well, in the 1930's this word was, and it is now, a fairly often encountered word in Polish ("zydokomuna"). It conveys the message and the idea that the communist movement was originated, organized, dominated, and run by the Jew; and consequently, all the calamities resulted from the communist terror are at least partly to blame on the Jews. It is not a proper place to discuss these issues here and now, this is just to let you know that if you go to Poland now you will encounter this word.*]

I chat for a long time with my pleasant friend. He is a sixty year old Jew, a member of the rowing society, and very sensitive to any mention of his considerable physical prowess. He was very sorry I could not stay for a dinner and had to go. He bid me a farewell, wished me the best in this and future life, and blessed me with a quote from the bible. I actually didn't even have time to ask for his name, but in spite of my vigorous protestations, he handed me a two feet long kosher sausage, as a symbol of international Jewish solidarity.

Lathi is a beautifully located small town, well known for its winter sports and for the largest radio station in the North. For the first time in our trip we pitch a tent, not very far from the dock for motor boats. A good natured and jolly looking proprietor of the camp speaks only Finnish. This does not stop him from letting us know that he is happy to see us and informing us that there is a lot of fish in the lake. This is done in a very patient and long conversation, with lots of drawing, gestures, and hand signs. We are not entirely convinced of his fish stories, but nevertheless we throw the lure in the lake, and after a couple of tries we pull in a two-pound northern pike. We prepare the pike in the journalistic style (clean the fish, salt it a bit, wrap it in a newspaper – that's where the name comes from – and place it on an open fire). It tastes very good. One more pleasant walk in the neighborhood, joined by some casual acquaintances – the tent is left open without anyone watching it, of course – one more glance at the map, and we put the kayak in the water and navigate toward Vääksa, a town located 28 kilometers away, on the other side of the lake Vesi. After getting to Vääksa, the plan is to negotiate several locks and arrive at Paijanne, one of the largest (120 kilometers long) and the most beautiful lakes in Finland. Everywhere you look, you see a forest. In the land of thousand lakes, the forest begins where the water ends. During the entire 150 kilometer trip we did not see any lake or river shore devoid of forest. The forest is the second, after water, native element of Finland. The third such element is granite. Where water does not reach, the forest lurks, unless the granite blocks its path. However the struggle between the forest and the water is not an even one: The water always wins, because the water is immortal. The water smothers the stumps of fallen trees with its swiftly flowing arms; the water provides the energy to the lumber saws that cut up the trees. If the forest still puts up the fight in this gigantic struggle, it is because of its size. The forests comprise 72.5 percent of this land. In every part of the country one encounters some of the largest factories of wooden bobbins in the world, gigantic factories of cellulose, paper, and other wood products. Even all the Finnish locomotives are powered by wood. "Green gold" is the phrase uttered by the lock official in Vaaksykanava, after studying the dictionary for an hour, while pointing to us, with a considerable pride, the forest that was surrounding us. Following an incredibly twisted lake Paijanne, traveling among the trees and granite rocks, with white nights that already begin to take their toll, after five days of this northerly journey, we finally arrive at the town of Jyvaskyla. From here we take the train to Kajani, where we are met by our Finnish friends, including Janhunenen.

A short rest break gives us an opportunity to get more acquainted with our traveling companions, as well as with one more wonderful manifestation of the Finns' love of freedom. This refers to the so called "Swedish table."

[Translator's note: *Well, in English it is of course called smorgasbord, but in Janek's piece it is called "Swedish table". I didn't know what to do in the translation, so take your pick. It is one more thing that seems to have been unknown in 1030's in Poland. I am sure it has made it to Poland by now*]

For the price of between ten and twenty marks, i.e. 1.10 to 2.20 zlotys – depending on the establishment – you are seated at a table with a big spread of all sort of food and drink: soups, cold deserts, meats, sausages, breads, cheeses, vegetables, fruits, whatever your heart desires and in whatever quantity you want. You probably would have to eat for five days straight to notice any dent in the quantity of the food on the table. You take whatever you want, in any way you want, as many times as you want, in any order you want; you have an opportunity combine various items, discover how a sour milk tastes with herring, and make whatever other culinary experiments you wish. The main duties of a waiter, who discretely stands some distance away, is to make sure that the food on the table is replenished when needed, and to make sure that the esteemed guests are not disturbed in any way while they wholeheartedly engage in this pigging out.

After such a lunch no one is not in mood to paddle, of course. We all lie around, warming in the sun, which looks like it also did some pigging out on its own, and shows no inclination of setting. We have lots of time. The darkness here, in this time of year, is an unknown phenomenon, so wherever we go, we get will there while it is still light.

Moreover, we deserve a rest. What awaits us is sixty kilometers of Lake Oulu, in other words a day and a half of paddling on beautiful water, very calm this time of year, without a possibility of setting up the sail. We will also catch about ten kilos of fish, which is altogether not too much for seven people, considering our education. [Translator's note: *That's what it says in the original. I have no idea what the education has to do with eating fish, but that's what Janek says.*] What lurks afterwards is an unforgettable experience of a wild – and let's admit it, crazy – run, through the rapids and the waterfalls of the river Oulojoki. We begin where Oulojoki flows out of the lake Oulu, in a picturesque village Vaala. In the tent, we study the guide to the kayaking in Finland and try to find out what does it say about our river. We read: "A special attention should be paid to rivers such as the river Oulujoki, which outflows from the lake Oulu, and which can be characterized as being navigable only in 14-meter, specialized tourist boats. These rivers, however, are absolutely impassable by kayak, The waterfall Niskakosk, the ten-meter rapids at the outlet of Lake Oulu, make it completely impossible to go through the rapids; violent whitewater currents hide the sudden drops in the riverbed, and toss the kayak around like a beach ball. If anyone is tempted to make such a trip, we recommend traversing the stretch in a long tourist boat first. After observing what's involved, the temptation will surely go away."

Well, it's not that bad. Oulu was traversed by many kayakers before. Besides, we want to scare the fish away from an Englishman, who is standing by the first waterfall, is equipped with a whole battery of anti-fish devices, and is calmly pulls in one leviathan after another. We have to teach him a lesson that life is not as simple as fishing in Finland. We button up our kayak parkas and without paying any attention to the warnings

from the guidebook, we charge straight ahead in the direction of the Englishman. We don't think about what will happen, or what might happen. Thinking is not all that useful sometimes. The kayak, while bouncing on the wild whitewater current should remain as light as possible, without additional ballast of logic. Moreover, this is not the time for philosophy. We have to paddle fast and furiously, with all our might, to maintain a good speed relative to the water, and to steer away from the rocks, appearing in a flash from this watery hell, and just as suddenly disappearing behind us, and while constantly threatening to end our kayaking career here and now. We must exercise in extreme our muscles, our eyes, our reflexes, so that we can follow the main stream. We have no time to enjoy the scenery that passes by. [Translator's note. *This entire experience of shooting the rapids is described by Janek in the Polish original in **one** sentence: 79 words, count them all, with lots of semicolons, numerous subordinate clauses, etc., etc. I broke it up into several shorter, more digestible bits.*] Nine kilometers of this ride, where every second is an experience, and every movement a lottery, was just a preparation for the next segment: 20 kilometer Pyhakoski rapids. It is enough to point out that in this stretch the river generate the energy of two hundred thousand horsepower, which is 50 percent more than the famous Imatra rapids, located further south. After several others of these more or less violent stretches, separated by relatively calm sections, in no time we realize that we covered 120 kilometers. We are now in the port city of Oulu. From here, from the world's northernmost railroad station Kauliranta, we take a bus to Lapland.

Part IV. Lapland – the land of the tyranny of the sun  
Nowy Dziennik, Thursday, September 23, 1937

Physics and Biology teach us that the sun is the source of all life and all movement on Earth. The sun holds the Earth in its orbit and causes it to rotate, thus resulting in days, nights, and the seasons. The sun transforms water into clouds, and because it heats the atmosphere in a non-uniform way, it creates the winds that push these clouds around, which in turn results in the rain and the snow, that then swell the rivers and the streams in the mountains, so the water flows back down the slopes. The sun gives life to the plants, allows them to perform the photosynthesis, so they can serve as food to the animals, and, together with the animals, the food for the humans. The sun maintains the atmosphere at such a temperature, as to allow organic life. The sun gives the joy to life; the sun is a source of happiness and health.

At our latitude we know the good side of the sun: a good friend and protector. But the sun can also be a tyrant, full of deliberate cruelty. It provides the environment for life, but does not allow the life to proceed. It creates a frozen, icy night, two month long, but then does not allow the death to occur. The people, the animals, the birds, and even the inanimate objects suffer under the yoke of sun-the-tyrant. Two months of murderous, constant light and sun in the sky in the summer, two months of completely black night in the winter, the slow death in the autumn, and a deeply tragic revolt against the sun's sadism and yearning for life in the spring – that's the perpetual yearly epic of Lapland's struggle against the life-giving sun. The sun positioned the Earth's sphere in such a way that the axis of its daily rotation is tilted from the axis of the yearly rotation, i.e. from the

axis of the elliptic plane, by the angle of 23 and half degrees. Consequently, the polar cap of the sphere that lies above the 66<sup>th</sup> northern parallel is, on the average, two months under complete control of the sun, two months in complete darkness and neglect, and the remaining time is spent in transitional state, going from summer to winter or conversely. The sun creates, somewhere around Florida, a warm current, called Gulf Stream, and then drives it thousands of kilometers toward the tip of the Scandinavian Peninsula to Lapland, to warm it up a bit and stir up the life. The life-giving Gulf Stream bypasses Greenland, which is located at the same latitude, but is covered by eternal ice. It lets her sleep quietly. But it murders the Lapland. It wakes up the life, and at the same time it plays a dismal practical joke on that life. The life has all the ingredients here for a normal development: the right temperature and enough air and water. But the sun does not permit a normal life. Is it possible to live normally, and in fact survive, when one is forced for two consecutive months, without a second's respite, to fight for existence and survival, without a possibility of some rest and sleep? Is it possible to live normally, and in fact survive, when one is forced for two months straight to exist in a state of idleness, longing for light, and spend the remainder of the year in uncertainty? This is why the nature in Lapland is so stunted and dwarfed. Fifteen year old birch trees have trunks that are thin, deformed, and full of knots, and reach the height of at most 30 centimeters. The grass is crawling on the ground, and has no strength to reach the level attained by its counterpart in the south. The junipers are desperately and hopelessly clinging to the rocky hillsides, and are supporting themselves with branches resting on the ground, like these were crutches. The vegetation in Lapland is tired. It would like to take a short nap. But the sun the guardian is watching and does not permit it to happen. For 24 hours the sun travels through the sky, reaching the lowest point at twelve o'clock "midnight", exactly in the northerly direction. Immediately afterwards, it rises again to complete its elliptical journey. As it nears the lowest point, everything in nature quiets down: the winds die down, the leaves and the grass stop murmuring. It is a moment of some kind of deadly expectation. One gets the impression that the nature is praying for the sun-the-tyrant to go somewhere below the horizon, or that is engaged in a strike to stir the sun's conscience. But to no avail. After a moment of short illusionary hope, the hard labor begins anew.

The life in Lapland has the character of a desperate struggle against its own destiny. Unbelievable numbers of flies, resembling mosquitoes, with long, slim legs and translucent wings, descend by the thousands on the people and the reindeer, they pack the entire life's passion into one final bite, and then they die shortly afterwards. They fulfill the sun's request; so they can now go to sleep. The reindeer quite often go mad from the bites of these flies. The Laplanders and the tourists spread a special kind of tar oil on the faces, the hands, the necks and other exposed body parts,. This oil's stench is so effective against the bites, that if I were a Lapland mosquito, I would myself stay far away from the people.

Even the inanimate nature is depressed by the state of the affairs. We traverse by foot a 70 kilometer stretch through the mountains of Pallastunturi, from the settlement of Laukkupalo to the destination of our journey: Hetta beyond Enontekio, while our kayaks and the rest of the baggage take a detour by a truck. From a distance, these mountains offer an impressive sight: A mighty, massive mountain range, the peaks reaching high

into the sky, devoid of any trees, with weathered rocks and occasional snow fields. But once we get closer, we discover that the highest peak of the range is the mountain Tai (“Sky Mountain”), barely 867 meters high, while the remaining peaks reach at most 750 or 800 meters. Perhaps the sun did not also allow the mountains to rise higher and ordered them to adjust to the surrounding landscape? The place is completely wild and desolate, with no sight of any human life, except for one abandoned Lapland hut, and during the three days it took us cross the range, we encounter only occasional reindeer bones and riekko – a lonely mountain eagle hunting for other birds.

Isn't anyone out there who would do something about the wrongs and unmerciful cruelties dished out on nature by the sun? Isn't there some other element of nature that would oppose all this, or at least in its own domain behave in a just and proper way? Well, there is. It is water. Water equalizes all the inequities, since by its nature does not tolerate difference in the level. The Lapland's water knows that in the south the life develops in a normal way and tries in any way it can to mitigate the Lapland's Gahanna. The water, in gigantic quantities, flows south through the rivers, starting from watershed located but 100 kilometers from the Arctic Ocean. In its mass it carries a wealth of riches, full of normal life, and such an abundance of various kinds of fish, that one almost has to push the fish aside with bare hands to see the water beneath. It is almost as if the water tried to annoy the sun and compensate for its cruelty to the nature. Water takes pity on life, in its depth it provides the life with some shade; the water is protesting, it is screaming, it tosses around, it flexes its back in the waterfalls, and it leisurely spreads out in quiet lakes. Gigantic lakes, full of majestic challenge to the sun, rivers that are several hundred kilometers long and are both turbulent and peaceful, these are the manifestations of the life giving water.

Twenty four hours of sun overhead is initially entertaining and convenient. One can start the day at nine o'clock in the “evening” – using our southern way of expressing things – then paddle and shoot the rapids of the Ounasjoki river at one o'clock in the morning, go to bed at eleven o'clock before noon, wake up in the afternoon and then, as a joke, try to guess the time without looking at one's watch. One then confirms the wisdom of Archimedes': Give me a place to stand and I will move the Earth. One does not need a flashlight, one can take pictures at any time of day, one can economize the language by dispensing with words “night”, “darkness”, “goodnight”, etc. One hears of jokes of the unfortunate chap who went to Lapland on his honeymoon at the beginning of the two month long day. One is initially happy that one is finally the master of time. But this feeling lasts a short time only and the novelty wears off. After couple of days the reality sets in. We all feel like being drunk. The sun forces us to lead a life in an excessively intensive way: we cannot sleep, even if we cover our eyes. The oars move in the water like the flies in a tar and only an occasional rapid or a waterfall brings us back to sobriety. We have enough of this freedom from time. We hurry south as fast as we can so we can get a decent sleep.

Part V. Flowers in Kuopio and prestige in Dukszty  
New Daily, Sunday October 10, 1937

After several sleepless nights, primarily because the nights are non-existent during the summers in Lapland, and after quite an exhausting, because of the terrain, the rocks, and the waterfalls (over 120 of them), navigation of the river Ounasjoki, we travel by train to the lakes of the south central Finland, with the intention and hope that, with the help of constantly blowing wind, we can travel, using the sails, toward the Bay of Finland, and rest up a little bit from paddling. Our Finish friends have ended their kayak trip in Roveniemi, and returned to Helsinki by train. After a ten hour train ride, exhausted by an unusual heat, we arrive in a beautiful town Kuopio, located on the lake Kallevesi. The evening arrives and the darkness, for which we so longed, begins to descend from the north. The lake, on which we will travel southward tomorrow, is located about two kilometers from the train station located in the center of town. It feels a bit awkward, we are dead tired, the night is approaching, and we really don't feel like trekking all the way to the lake to seek a place to pitch the tent. Perhaps we could get our sleep a lot closer, with a lot less effort, especially since our only immediate goal is to crawl into the sleeping bags and catch some sleep. We thus approach a policeman standing near the train station, a man of considerable girth, with sternly looking moustache, and ask him where one could pitch a tent, hopefully somewhere close by. The fatso, with a menacing, unchangingly stern expression, points in reply to a beautiful bed of flowers located right here in a city park. We are a bit confused; his face is as stern as ever and shows no emotion, no ironic smile. He is either a great prankster, or a typical Finish cop. In spite of being dead tired, and in spite of knowing a little bit about local Finish customs, we get intrigued. Is the fatso going to have some fun at our expense? Will he indeed allow us pitch our tent in the midst of this carefully tended bed of flowers? Well, let's call his bluff. After profusely apologizing to our ineptness of not being able to come up with the simple solution to our problem without bothering his majestic officialdom, we begin to pitch the tent in the midst of the most beautiful floral display, and carefully observe his reaction. The fatso does not react in any way. He continues his walk with the usual measured pace, and it is not interfering with us in any way. After sleeping the whole night surrounded by heavenly flower aroma, in the morning we see another guardian of peace, who is smiling and saluting us. He was told by the fatso where we are going and, after consulting a dictionary, greets us in one sentence. Unfortunately, he could not say anything more. Most likely, if we stayed in the vicinity until the evening, he could have come up with three more sentences. He has a lot of time, he is a Finn.

Mr. Hörbinger was a famous engineer, well known for his inventions of some very ingenious valves used in pumps and compressors. He has devoted his free time, however, to the study of glacial cosmogony. In that field of science, largely created and named by himself, he was proving that the world was created from the glaciers, and that the glaciers form the cradle of the organic life on this earth, and in fact the glaciers are the cradle of the human existence. Undoubtedly, the contributions of the engineer Hörbinger in the field of glacial cosmogony were not as good as his valves; it is quite possible that his entire glacial theory would melt at the slightest professional scrutiny, and that his

contributions in this field are more of an anecdotal nature, as compared to much more solid achievements in the area of technology. One cannot, however, escape an impression that were Hörbinger better known in Finland, he would have been a cult figure. The glacial period left in Finland a remarkable memento in the form of an uncountable number of lakes, without which, in the mind of every Finn, the life would have been impossible. Finland is unjustly called the land of thousand lakes: According to the most detailed maps that number is over 60 thousand, moreover those maps, because of their scale ((1:400000), do not show any of the smaller reservoirs of water. Every Finn would be personally offended if anyone would have the audacity to express a view that his country has fewer than hundred thousand lakes. “Järvi” (lake) has songs devoted to it, it is spoken with a great awe and respect, “järvi” is an inseparable part of a Finn, like a land is an inseparable part of a peasant: A peasant without land ceases to be a peasant and the Finn without “järvi” is no longer a Finn.

Enjoying a beautiful weather, and taking advantage of the tail winds that were almost made to order, we swiftly move under a full sail along the mosaic of forests, outcrops of granite, uncountable number of islands and twisted peninsulas in the direction of the township of Savolinn. The only chore we have during this sojourn is to mind the sail and pull the fish on the lure out of the water, and the only problem we have is to correlate the map with the surrounding terrain, with all of its geographical puzzles. Southern Finland is welcoming us with all of her natural hospitality: The daylight hours are free of flies, so we can finally wash away the Lapp tar oil from our faces, necks, and arms; the surrounding evergreen forests, full of scent of the pine sap, invite us to venture inside them and to enjoy the darkness, a commodity so dearly desirable north of the arctic circle; and the pike are practically jumping out of the water into a frying pan. In an unabashed fit of laziness, cheating the forces of nature by using a piece of sail cloth, we slowly pass one of the wonders of nature, namely the glacial spit called Punkaharju, seven kilometer long with a white ribbon of highway on top of it, and finally arrive at the lake Saimaa, an international gathering of kayakers and universally agreed as being the prettiest lake in Finland. One can encounter there the tents and the kayaks of Brits, Germans, Swedes, Norwegians, not to mention the Finns, – there are even two citizens of Monaco here, a veritable, floating League of Nations. We all do the same things, we all fish in the same way, and we all use the wind to propel us along. We all get along famously, and we all proceed in the same direction, i.e., that of the wind. Small culinary questions assume dimensions of international problems, settled at international conferences, with constantly changing membership. One has a feeling that Saimaa is not in Finland, but in some international territory. On a balmy evening, enormous moon is shining on all of us, it hangs from the sky above the horizon like a giant balloon, but it does not give much light.

We do not forget to take a detour to see the famous waterfalls Imatra. Enormous quantities of “white coal” from the entire water system of Saimaa are falling at the rate of 600 cubic meters per second upon the blades of the turbines of the electric grid system, whose total power output is 120 thousand kilowatts, and which supplies most of the energy for almost the entire south and central Finland. The entry to the Imatra power plant is free and open to everyone, of course. All the visitors are welcomed and given a

guided tour of this largest hydroelectric facility of its kind in Europe. It was constructed during the years 1921 –1929 and is already too small to meet the constantly raising demand caused by the ever increasing prosperity.

In the vicinity of Lapeenrant we enter the Saimaakanava canal and, after negotiating 35 locks, we arrive at the largest lumber port Viipuri. Here, because of the lateness of season with the resulting colder and colder nights, and most of all because of personal financial limitations (our money has run out), we decided to forgo the prospects of many tantalizingly exciting sounding adventures awaiting us, should we had decided to travel to Helsinki by the sea along the Bay of Finland, postponing these escapades for some other, more opportune time in the future. Instead, we travel from Helsinki to Grodno, then navigate to Warsaw via the river Niemen, the Agustin Canal, Agustian Lakes, then paddle the rivers Biebrza, Narwia, Bug and Wisla, and finally take a train to Krakow.

In conclusion, I cannot refrain from admitting an infraction which I committed in a city of Dukszta, located 25 kilometers from the Polish-Latvian border. We were right by a railroad station, one set of tracks separating us from the station proper. We had a train to catch, the train being scheduled to stop there for only one minute. To get to the station we either had to cut straight across the tracks, or go all the way around through the official train track crossing. The second alternative was additionally complicated by the fact that it would force us to enter the border area (entering the border requires a special pass, and is strictly forbidden without a such). It was also considerably longer. The place was pretty much deserted, and after a quick glance to check that no guardian of peace is present anywhere around, – in about two steps, I took the shortcut. I was very much under the delusion that this anti-state activity will remain unpunished. Besides, accustomed to the Finish freedom, I assumed that everything was going to be OK anyway. However, a different opinion was held by a suddenly appearing guard from the Sate Railroad Police. Here he was, a gendarme, with a gun, with an official hat whose strap run across his chin, and with a very official and stern demeanor. After an inquiry “Which railroad crew are you a part of?”, and after my reply “I don’t quite understand”, he ascertained that I am an ordinary citizen and proceeded escorted me to a office of the station master, who in turn, after a lecture about the “prestige”, instructed my guardian to file official charges and prepare the papers to the effect. And thus I went: The first name, the family name, the names of the parents, the date of birth, the place of birth, the place of work, the place of residence, the street, the house number, marital status, bachelor or married, mother’s maiden name, the identity card number, by whom issued and where, the religious affiliation. After all this was done according to the required ritual, the station master dully informed me that in due time I will be called in by some official of the place of my domicile to further deal with the issue, and that I should forever remember that one must circumvent the railroad tracks but not the official decrees, especially when the regional inspector is currently at the station and she is observing everything.

An inescapable mental comparison is formed in one’s mind: A cop in Kupio, allowing the tired tourists to pitch a tent among the flower bed, versus not even a policeman, but a railroad official in Dukszta. A policeman in Kupio, who always has

time, who is never in a hurry, advising the tourists not to walk too far, versus our own “defender of the prestige” who knows that train is leaving in a minute, and orders the same tourists to go a long way around the track, and then to sign the official complaint, because they have not done so the first time. It seems that the difference is in the mentality of these two people: One of them, even though he has a lot of time still prefers to go the simplest route, while the other is devising the most complicated and circumspect way, in spite of the fact that the train stops at the station for only one minute. It takes about four and a half hour by plane to get from Warsaw to Helsinki. Perhaps we should send our prestige expert to via Helsinki to visit the fat cop in Kupio?

[Translator’s note. The Polish language has a peculiarity in that one is tempted, when writing, to use long and convoluted sentences, with numerous subordinate clauses, which in turn have more subordinate clauses, etc., etc. They just really don’t like the periods and the upper case letters. In addition, Janek succumbs to this temptation in a big way. Thus, the above should be viewed as a translation, not a as a transliteration. I tried to keep some of the sentences intact to preserve the original flavor, but keeping them all intact make the text extremely unintelligible.]

Translated by Vladimir Drobot – nephew