

Rovaniemi July 15th, 2001

Dear John Adams High School Class '61

I am truly sorry that I will not be able to attend the 40th reunion as I intended to - my work schedule in the Arts Council of Lapland does not allow it after all. What a pity! However, I send you my warmest greetings all the way from the City of Rovaniemi, Lapland, which has been my home for the past 26 years.

During the last years I have not been very good in keeping in touch with my American friends or my American family, but nevertheless there is an unbroken tie to John Adams and South Bend in my heart, always.

Is it really forty years since my very happy year as an exchange student at Adams High School! It was the year that kindled in my heart the never-ending curiosity and affection towards the world and its various cultures. It is unbelievable how vividly the memories come back - the taste of American way of life at the age of sweet seventeen: the warm welcome I received at Adams, the cozy atmosphere, yet high standard academic ambitions in the classes (how I struggled to get English or Spanish spelling or the facts of US history right, how I enjoyed the debates in the speech class!), the Glee-Club, the football and basketball games with cheerleaders, the parties and proms, the drive-ins, hamburgers and potato chips, the bitter sweet romance with a handsome American boy ...

What has happened in my life after I left Adams? I was married in '67 to Esa, my great love and dear husband ever since, got three children (two sons and a daughter), I graduated from the University of Helsinki as MA in political science and continued my work at the Finnish television till the beginning of 70's when our family moved first to Afganistan, then to Tanzania, Africa for some years. At the end of seventies we decided to move to Lapland, where my husband continued his work first in the Red Cross, then as the cultural coordinator of Rovaniemi City, and myself as the district coordinator of the national organization of mentally handicapped. In the middle of the 90's we returned to our beloved Africa for two years, this time to Zambia, and now we are back in Lapland.

Little by little there has been a change in my professional ambitions and career. Ever since my television days I had become interested in the art of puppetry. In the 80's I got a special training in the Theatre Academy of Helsinki as a professional puppeteer. It is over twelve years now that I started a solo theatre of my own, *Travelcase Theatre*, which has been touring around Finland and the northmost area of Scandinavia ever since. With my theatre I have also visited festivals in Europe, Africa and Canada. Right now I am having a two year job as the regional artist in puppetry employed by the Arts Council of Lapland. It is my job, among other things, to try to get started a regional centre of professional puppetry here in my home city. I have also been active in building up co-operation of puppet theatres in the Barents Area (Northmost Norway, -Sweden, -Finland and -Russia) -- an exciting network of artists from different cultural backgrounds.

I am very content with my life and work in this beautiful northern area of Scandinavia. My future plans include retirement in five years from active entertaining and touring, and after that doing some research and writing on puppetry arts. I have not yet any grandchildren, but I certainly hope my future will bless me with the role of a grandmother too. My children have been so far too busy to settle down with families: my oldest son Lasse (33) is just about to finish his doctoral theses on environmental politics, my second born Timo (32) drama literature major, is very busy as a film journalist and critic, and my daughter Johanna (24) is studying to become a drama teacher in two years.

I have visited United States five times during these 40 years -- next summer I will attend the bi-annual council meeting of the World Puppetry Union (UNIMA) in Atlanta, Georgia and take an excursion to some of the many puppet theatre centres in the United States and Canada.

I warmly thank the organizing committee for keeping me up to date with the reunion arrangements. I wish everyone of you reunion participants all the best on this precious moment of togetherness -- enjoy each others' company!

With warm thoughts and love,

Leila (Harjanne)

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