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Under the Loupe: Ester Pihl

Sisu pastilles and Fazer candies that Ester tasted for the first time in second grade were absolutely amazing. It's not impossible that her interest in Finland and the Finnish language started from this experience!



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Ester tells us more:

My first memory related to Finland is probably from the second or third grade. There was this girl Irma sitting next to me in school. Her grandma had visited relatives in Finland and brought back Fazer candy, Sisu pastilles, licorice and Jenkki-gum, and Irma now generously shared these treats with me. Oh the joy! These sweets were in colorful wrappings and smelled and tasted wonderful!

Irma's grandma Kaarina was Finnish and grandpa Raimo Carelian, and they spoke Finnish at home. Their Estonian was spoken with heavy accent. To my ears, Finnish sounded sometimes very similar to the Tartu dialect that my grandma spoke. For example, they had similar vowel harmony.

The next connection to the Finnish language happened in the Pedagogical Institute of Tallinn where I studied. Back then, it wasn't possible to graduate as a Finnish language teacher. However, all students whose major was Estonian also had to take Finnish classes. Although the diploma reads "Estonian language and literature teacher", the Estonian language as a foreign language was actually my minor.

I met a lot of interesting people, a number of Finnish students who had received a scholarship and now studied in Tallinn, and even one Japanese student who was extremely interested in Finno-Ugric studies. This person later learned to speak Estonian using a self-made language learning model!

Finnish quickly became one of my favorite classes. Also our supervisor must have noticed that, because when she went on a maternity leave, she asked me to sub her Finnish classes at Tallinn's 4th High School. It was only my second year at the university, so language learning and teaching experience came mostly through practice and self-learning.

I started to meet more Finnish people and made more friends with them. When the Iron Curtain fell, the neighboring culture became even more familiar.

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Have you always worked as a teacher?

Not always. I worked 8 years as a state officer, out of which five years at the Ministry of Education. There, my work was to coordinate projects with Nordic and Baltic countries and later to do other international collaboration work. After that I worked three years at the international department of the Ministry of Environment where I was involved in designing the environmental chapter for Estonia, which was important part of becoming the member of European Union. I have also completed a number of translation and interpretation works in various translation companies, taught Estonian in a Russian speaking high school in Maardu and taught Russian in a Finnish-Swedish company in Finland.

How did you end up at Puumedi? How long have you been here?

When my child was born, I spent some time at home, and occasionally took on some translation work. When my kid started preschool, I wanted to get out from the home office. I saw the job advertisement, where Puumedi was looking for a Finnish language teacher. I had just finished translating a thorough medical book in Finnish, so the vocabulary was fresh in the memory.

I went to a job interview and soon started as a Finnish language teacher. At first I taught doctors, later also dentists. A few years later I got the chance to teach Finnish for doctors and dentists from other countries. As of last August, I've been working at Puumedi for 9 years.

What are your work tasks in addition to teaching?

We make a lot of teaching materials. This requires continuous self-learning and interest in the health care system, medicine and anatomy. Of course, exploring and learning new teaching methods is important too.

I teach mostly advanced courses. Therefore, I first need to identify the so-called "white spots" in the student's skills. Then we can set goals for her and based on those goals, prepare necessary materials. To put it in medical language: First, I review the medical records, then take necessary tests, give a diagnosis and then come up with a treatment plan that we work on together.

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What does your typical workday look like?

Usually I come to work at about nine o'clock, review and print the materials which I put together the day before, read e-mails and check in with my coworkers to see if there's anything important going on.

Classes are generally from ten to two. Coffee breaks and lunch times depend on students' preferences.

After the classes I look through the written tests, plan the next day's classes, respond to e-mails and see if there's anything important to discuss with my co-workers. The workday usually ends somewhere in between 15.30 and 18.

What do you like the most in your work and what is difficult?

I am happy that I can do the work that I really like. I'm particularly happy to see my students' progress, but I always learn something myself too and get to meet interesting people. I really appreciate flexible work hours.

Difficulties are needed for every person to develop and keep moving forward. In fact, instead of *difficulties* I'd like to use the word *challenges*. At Puumedi's training, we were reminded that anything you want to achieve in your life is outside your comfort zone. I think that's true. Fortunately, the teacher's work is always challenging enough to keep the mind fresh.

What have you gained from teaching doctors?

Certainly a lot of information about the health care system in Finland, but also a lot about doctors' work. Students have sometimes jokingly said that if they need someone to sub them, they will call me ☺

I've also realized that the majority of the most common chronic diseases are actually lifestyle diseases, so the best way to prevent them is to live a healthy lifestyle. In Finland, there are even official medical manual about that, titled "Exercise", and the according guide for the patient, called "Exercise is Medicine".

Finnish for foreigners can be quite a challenge. How do you make learning Finnish language as easy as possible for your students?

I'd compare the language learning with buying a home. How you feel about it matters a lot!

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Students must like what they learn, and they have to be taught in informative and practical manner. I've noticed that when the topic is interesting, any discussion quickly becomes a simple and natural, as if a person forgets what language she speaks.

I also like the idea by the language teacher and linguist Ülle Türk, who says that there are four things that are needed to learn a foreign language. The first three of them are mandatory and the last one recommended:

- 1) the opportunity to hear the language
- 2) the opportunity to express thoughts in that language
- 3) the motivation to use these opportunities
- 4) support from the teacher.

Based on my experience, I can say that, indeed, when these conditions are met, language learning becomes much easier.

What is the recipe for learning a foreign language quickly?

Definitely motivation and commitment. You have to find and make time to study. A student must have an active and positive attitude. She should watch and listen to TV and radio and read the news or interesting articles. It's really helpful to have a Finnish friend, why not a Facebook friend, with whom you can practice speaking. Also, remember to be proud of your achievements!

If the student's motivation is fading, what do you do?

It happens. We need to discuss this and find out the reason of loss of motivation and see if I can help.

Sometimes I can't. For example, one case comes to my mind, where the student realized that his personal life was too complicated at this point of his life, so there wasn't any room for language learning. He decided that he will continue learning the language once he's emotionally in a better place.

What do you do besides work and how do you relax?

I've always been interested in guide's work. Last year, I actually went to study it and have already practiced it on guiding tours in Finnish in the Old Town of Tallinn. Next spring I'm going to apply for a guide's license.

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I read a lot, often I walk to the sea through the forest from my home, go to sauna, ride my bike, do yoga, dance and bake. Everyday chores at home can actually balance work life well. Even cleaning can be fun with the company of good music and interesting podcast. I also enjoy the family life and my role as a wife and mother.

What are the three things without which you wouldn't be able (or wouldn't want) to live?

The first things that came to mind are the sea and sea air, good food and books. ☺

Describe your perfect day.

I have noticed that each day can be made perfect when it's started with meaningful morning routines. Yoga in the rising sun, mug of fresh coffee with hot milk and understanding that every day is a gift that is given to me.

Thank you Ester!!

Tax Returns Will be Paid at the End of November - Remember to Provide Your Account Number!

To get the tax refunds in time and directly into your bank account, remember to provide your bank account number through the [account number notification service](#) before 18.11. The account number must be provided if you haven't done it in the past, or if you want to change the number you have previously given to the tax office. You can have just one valid account number in Tax Administration's database.

To provide your account number online, you need to log in with your personal online banking ID.

If you send your bank account number in time, refunds will be paid 29.11. If you don't send your account number by 18.11, the tax refund will be paid later, 7.-9.12. You will receive a notification of the payment by mail and you can go and raise your return from any OP Bank Group bank branch or OP's online bank during the next 28 days from the date of notification.

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Source: vero.fi

Cancer Treatment of Five Finnish University Hospitals in Comparison

Finland highest level of cancer care is provided in five university hospitals, in Helsinki, Turku, Tampere, Kuopio and Oulu. Now, cancer therapies in these hospitals have been studied and compared in detail. The results were published in the Finnish Medical Journal (Suomen Lääkärilehti).

The Main Findings of the Study

One of the things compared in the study was the number of devices to the number of patients. In Helsinki, there are almost twice as many patients per one radiotherapy machine than in Turku.

The study also compared the length of hospitalization periods. Inpatient sections are the shortest in Tampere and longest in Oulu University Hospital. The long inpatient periods of Oulu are caused, among other things, by long distances, so the patients have to stay in hospital longer. In Oulu ward there are also patients whose condition has been impaired to the extent that they are unable to come to the treatment from home.

In Oulu, there are more patients per doctor than anywhere else: Over 200 patients more than in Helsinki and nearly 300 patients more than in Turku. On the other hand, Oulu has the most nurses in relation to the number of appointments.

In Kuopio, less radiotherapy is given than anywhere else. That's because of the new precision radiotherapy device *cyber knife*. In the past, radiation treatment consisted of 36 sessions, but with *cyber knife*, 6-7 treatment sessions are usually enough.

The investigation also showed that there can be significant differences in the efficiency of various cancer treatments within the same hospital. For example, In Kuopio, there are major differences between breast and prostate cancer treatment outcomes. At this point, there are no more results revealed about each hospital's results.

Source: yle.fi

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New Rare Borrelia Ticks were Found in Finland

Scientists have discovered rare ticks in Finland. The discovered type is fairly rare also in the rest of the world. The new Borrelia bacteria carried by ticks causes flu-like symptoms, high fever, and inflammation of the central nervous system, but not any kind of skin symptoms such typical of the ring rash.

The more common Lyme Borrelia bacterium is carried by about every fifth tick, but recently discovered Borrelia miamotoi bacteria have occurred in less than one percent of all instances. Bacterial adhesion is not reported in Finland, but in Russia at least 40 people have been infected.

Infection caused by Borrelia miamotoi bacteria can be treated with similar antibiotics that are used to treat other tick infections.

Source: yle.fi

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