
Newsletter
FinNALA

Finnish North American Literature Association

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FinNALA will host a second creative writing contest. It requests applications for judges from its membership roles. We need one judge for each of the categories: short fiction, poetry, and children's literature. If you are willing, please email Beth Virtanen at bethvirtanen@yahoo.com.

FinNALA is also working to secure a venue for literary activities at Finn Fest USA 2010, from July 28 to August 1, in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada. Updates will be sent via our membership list and posted on the website.

Finnish-American Artwork



Alone on the Beach by Dave Ellis

You can find artwork by **Dave Ellis**'s studio online at www.davidellisartstudio.com

K. Alma Peterson has a chapbook entitled *Befallen* published in 2009 by Propaganda Press and is available online at www.alt-current.com or from K. Alma Peterson via email kalmap@frontiernet.net.

Finnish-American Artwork



Stargazer Flower by Dave Ellis

Lisbeth Holt is pleased to announce her forthcoming second volume of poetry "Was It Yours, Sheherazade?" It will appear probably by early fall by PublishAmerica and then available through amazon.com and www.barnes&noble.com.

Kaarina Brooks has translated *Suomen Lasten Kalevala* as *The Kalevala: Tales of Magic and Adventure*. This handsome, hard-bound edition is a combined prose and verse edition by Kirsti Mäkinen, illustrated by Pirkko-Liisa Surojegin with full-color

illustrations. The text is published by Simply Read Books. It's exquisite.

Three Finnish Poets Read!

Sheila Packa, Diane Jarvenpa, and Kirsten Dierking will read as part of the *Verse and Converse Series*, at Nina's Cafe in St. Paul, Minnesota, just upstairs from Garrison Keillor's *Common Good Books*. Wednesday, Oct 7, 2009, 7:00 pm.

G. K. Wuori has published a play, *Wendy's Friend*. You can find it online here: http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v8n1/gallery/wuori_g/play_intro.shtml

G. K. Wuori was also a July participant in the Smithsonian Institution's 2009 national program titled, "Journeys." The program emphasizes the ways in which the nation has been grounded in motion: from town to city, city to frontier, frontier to farmland, and so on.

The program in Sycamore, Illinois – one of the few small town venues for the program – was titled, "Print Journeys," and featured Wuori and New York Times/Newsweek reporter Dirk Johnson recounting how their worldwide travels as writers ultimately led them to life in a small Illinois farming community. Wuori's talk detailed how a killing in the Maine wilderness led to his first novel, while Johnson discussed what it was like covering such stories as the Columbine massacre and the Oklahoma City bombing.

Greg Watson has published a new book of poems titled, *The Distance Between Two Hands*. Read a review on the FinNALA website.

Pete Oikarinen and **Barb Simila** have a new website for Big Lake Gallery. Here is the link: <http://www.biglakegallery.com>

K. A. Laity has published *Unikirja: Dream Book*. It is a collection of creative works, including prose and poetry, drama and fiction in an attractive soft cover edition from Aino Press of Albany, New York.

Lauri Anderson was a guest writer at the Scandinavian festival on 26-28 June in Fargo/Moorhead. He also gave two lectures, titled "Finns are Funny in Spite of Themselves" and "Turning the Personal into Fiction."

Jim Johnson's new book of poems, *Driving Gravel Roads* is available. Read a review on the FinNALA website.

Josef Aukee has published *Town and Country*, a fabulous new book of poems. Read a review on the FinNALA website.

Johanna Rauhala now blogs at <http://johannasantidote.blogspot.com>.

Steve Lehto is in the *Detroit News* on Monday, August 3, 2009. The story is reprinted below.

Jay Leno gets rare Chrysler, author gets plug for book by Neal Rubin

If not for the *Finnish American Reporter*, Steve Lehto would never have eaten barbecued chicken in Jay Leno's garage after taking a ride in a car that sounds like a vacuum cleaner.

Also, Lehto wouldn't have finally found an agent for his book about the Chrysler Turbine. And we wouldn't know what Leno did between those free shows for out-of-work Detroiters in April at The Palace of Auburn Hills.

The *Finnish American Reporter* is a little journal crafted each month in Hancock and distributed throughout the country. Lehto is a big Finnish-American lawyer

whose roots burrow deep into the copper country of the Upper Peninsula.

He's also an author, and one of his books is about the 1913 tragedy in Calumet in which someone yelled "Fire" in a crowded social hall on Christmas Eve, and 73 people, most of them the children of striking miners, were suffocated or trampled to death. "Death's Door," he called it: "The Truth Behind Michigan's Largest Mass Murder."



Steve Lehto and Jay Leno

Photo by Cliff Gromer.

Leno does not collect gloomy books about Upper Peninsula catastrophes. He does, however, have an affinity for odd clippings, which he used to display on "The Tonight Show" every Monday. One of them, two years ago, turned out to be an advertisement for Lehto's book in one of the finest Finnish-American periodicals in all the land. Above the gloomy title and dour cover, the ad declared, "Makes a great Christmas gift!"

Lehto didn't see the broadcast, but as he drove from his home in Grand Blanc to his office in Royal Oak the next morning, his cell phone was doing cartwheels. In gratitude, Lehto wrapped a copy of the book in the gaudiest Christmas paper he could find and sent it to Leno's office in California. He also included the manuscript

for a book he wrote in 2004 about the legendary '63 Chrysler Turbine.

That wasn't as easy as it sounds. No publisher wanted the book, and Lehto had to resurrect an old laptop with a burned-out monitor just to make the printout. Leno adores cars, though, so he figured it was worth the effort.

A few days later, Lehto's secretary buzzed his desk. "Steve," she said, "there's a guy on the phone who says he's Jay Leno."

Driving a Turbine: Accelerating the story:

They talked. They bonded. Leno asked if he could hold onto Lehto's card. The economy tanked. Hordes of people were thrown out of work. Leno performed here.

Six weeks passed. Then he called. He asked questions about the Turbine. He asked more questions. Hmm, thought Lehto, 47, a trained inquisitor. "Did you swing by Chrysler when you were in town," he asked, "and buy a car from them?"

Yes.

The Chrysler Turbine was essentially a stylish, bronze-colored, four-seat sedan with a jet engine. It could run on gasoline, kerosene, or just about anything else, including Chanel No. 5 and tequila.

Of the 55 that Chrysler produced, none were sold to the public, and all but nine were destroyed when the experiment ended. A collector in Indiana owns one. Museums have five. Chrysler had three -- and now one of them is Leno's.

"He offered to let me drive it if I was ever in town," Lehto says, "which I just happened to be, as soon as I could get tickets."

Cruising Burbank: Further accelerating the story:

Two Saturdays ago. Graciousness. Good humor. Yelps and cheers from bystanders as they cruised the streets of Burbank. Cuisine from a grill in one of

Leno's garages. Another ride in a steam-powered 1907 White. More yelps and cheers.

Also, an offer from Leno. If it'll help sell the book, he'll write a forward. It *does* help; a New York agent has agreed to shop it around.

Lehto is still in car-buff heaven. "I was 3 feet across from Jay Leno," he marvels, "having lunch. And by the way, his new show will be on the air Sept. 14."

Check out the article at the link below.

<http://detnews.com/article/20090803/OPINION03/908030315/Neal-Rubin--Leno--author-get-a-push>

Beth L. Virtanen, Professor and Paloheimo Scholar at Finlandia University, has taken on the editorship of the *Journal of Finnish Studies* with Co-editor Hanna Snellman of the University of Jyväskylä in Finland and Assistant Editor Hilary Joy Virtanen who is a doctoral candidate in Scandinavian Studies at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

Virtanen has also presented papers on Finnish-North American Literature at two conferences in Turku, Finland. In late June, she presented "Expressions of Immigrant Generation in Finnish-North American Fiction" at the Finnish-American Immigrants in Transition Workshop sponsored by the Institute of Migration and supported by the Department of History at the University of Turku. In late July, she presented "Kalevala Incarnations in Finnish-North American Science Fiction and Fantasy" at the International Popular Culture conference held at the Scandic Plaza Hotel in Turku.

Beth L. Virtanen has also delivered the manuscript titled *Finnish North American Literature in English: A Concise Anthology* to The Edwin Mellon Press. The anthology includes selections from twenty multiple-

book poets and authors of Finnish-North American heritage. Cover art by Joyce Koskenmaki titled "Autumn Birches" will appear on the front cover. A digital representation of the oil on linen is reproduced below. The anthology will appear in print early in 2010.



"Autumn Birches" by Joyce Koskenmaki (reprinted by permission of the artist and copyright holder)

The Trinity Poetry Series in Sonoma California

Don Hagelberg delivered three poems, one each on addiction, treatment and recovery from alcoholism and addiction at the Sunday, August, 16th poetry series at Trinity Episcopal Church in its sheltered Abbot's Courtyard in Sonoma California as the day flowed from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

The first poem on 'addiction' fused habitual use of cigarettes and marijuana, or hashish, with the Hebrew root of the word "spirit" or "soul," namely "that which is breathed in." The irony was appreciated.

The second poem about 'treatment' employed a theoretical concept, which Don

named “The Implied Conceit,” or “The Implied Extended Metaphor.” Instead of talking about the character that undergoes treatment for drug addiction, he spoke of the addict’s pregnant dog in the house of the poem’s speaker, who also witnesses the birth of the dog’s litter. Each puppy born to this litter represents one problem which the mistress becomes aware of in treatment. The key to this observation is in the opening quote from Father Tom Weston, S.J. who states that, “One gives birth to a new self in recovery,” which is a masterful re-wording of a famous quote by Eric Fromm.

The third poem about recovery is the shortest poem in the trio and is reprinted below, with permission, to give you a small taste of the reading.

Toxic Antithesis

By Don Hagelberg
For Claire Drucker

Accompanying the power of addiction,
My life began to bloat until my soul
Gave up control to something called belief
In one who grants insanity for sto-

Len acts of bad faith, breathed
Before tall risers with deep treads had come.
To both be restored as well as to have a
future,

As if the race once run could be re-run,
I paid the other, whom I owed, face-
To-face until the Other, satisfied,
Flash-bulbed me like sunshine mace;
And I walked, from those bribed

By substances, past moral inventories:
A body, once dead, now a living synthesis.

Claire Drucker, the one to whom the poem is dedicated, is an instructor at the Community College in Santa Rosa, who specializes in inspiring wrung-out poets to

squeeze yet one more metaphor out of the rag of common language to slake the thirst of the poetic audience.

This same poem has been read on the online radio program, “Recovery Coast to Coast,” in the Seattle-Tacoma region of Washington State, as well as on KGO Radio, the mega-watt station broadcasting from San Francisco, California, which can be heard in Kansas during the night.

Seventy-five, sequentially numbered, thick paper eight by ten inch copies of the poem, suitable for picture framing, were printed. Two thirds of that number were handed out, gratis, to the audience which came to hear “The Trinity Poetry Series,” at the church in Sonoma’s Wine Country, North of San Francisco Bay.

Reading with Don were the more established poets: Selene Steese, Jeanne Powell, Leonore Wilson, Joan Brady, Dick Cole, Margo van Veen and Joseph Jacobs with a surprise appearance by Lin Marie de Vincent.

Patricia Bradley, a professor of Journalism, organized, set-up with the help of parishioners and hosted the four Sunday readings at Trinity Episcopal Church.

Diane Dettmann presented *Miriam Daughter of Finnish Immigrants* at the Finnish-American Immigrants In Transition seminar in Turku, Finland June 1-2, 2009 . Her sister Mary Jones, the artist who did the sketch work for the book, participated in the session. The international seminar draws researchers from Finland, Denmark, Canada and the United States. Diane’s presentation focused on her grandparents’ Finnish-American experience as the family faced challenges of assimilation into the culture of northern Minnesota in the early 1900s. The paper she prepared for the seminar is being considered for publication in the *Journal of Finnish Studies*.

Dettmann was also interviewed by KAXE Radio on July 8th and *Miriam Daughter of Finnish Immigrants* was featured on their morning show. Scott Hall called the book a “great story” and he affirmed the value and importance of family stories.

Diane is currently working on her memoir, *Mice in the Kitchen*. She plans to attend the La Jolla Writers Conference in November where she will read her work and receive feedback from other writers. The conference is a wonderful opportunity to network with agents, publicists, representatives of major bookstores and published authors many of which donate their time for the conference.

Haari Siitonen provides two news stories.

According to the Finnish Literary Services, *Books from Finland* will be printed online. The Finnish Literature Society's English language publication, *Books from Finland*, published its last print edition in December. It will become an Internet publication with its first issue expected in mid-April. This valuable resource of new literature in Finland had been issued in printed form since 1967. The online edition will be free of charge. For further information, check out: www.booksfromfinland.fi.

Listen to Finnish authors live in audio recordings. For readers who know the Finnish language, here's a chance to hear some of the best known Finnish authors talk in audio recordings, a service provided by the Pirkkalaiskirjailijat (The Pirkanmaa or The Tampere Region Authors) an organization which was first established in 1943 at Tampere. In its archives are hundreds of recordings of authors addressing the meetings of the society over the years.

Pirkanmaan Kirjailijat is now in the process of digitalizing these talks. So far, ten are listener-ready, which include writers like Väinö Linna, Erno Paasilinna, Pentti

Saarikoski, Juice Leskinen, Kjell Westö, Eeva Kilpi, Veijo Meri, Kirsi Kunnas and Jaan Kross.

It's fun to listen to these writers, several of them deceased, talk about writing and literature in their own voices. Most of these comments are only a few minutes long. Tune in by tapping into www.pirkkalaiskirjailijat.net.

Rothko Red

By K. A. Laity

I fell apart one day in front of the Rothkos in the Tate Modern. I recognized in a shrill cry despair and a wordlessly howling grief, but I did not recognize it as my voice at all. There had been no sensation of the sound rising or the power that drove it. I had been quietly sitting on the bench as was not an uncommon habit for the afternoons lately. It was the way to while away my free time since losing my job.

My lover, Keith, had disparaged me for it. "Why aren't you looking for work? How are we going to keep this flat if you don't have a salary?" I would dutifully check the job listings each morning, circle likely prospects, and then lose the paper somewhere between our flat and the South Bank.

Sometimes I would go watch the Surrealists' films, taking up valuable cushion space while others stood, sighed and eventually moved on. But most often I would go to the Rothkos, soaking in the dark canvases and the sombre lighting which nearly always hushed those who came through the doorway, enforcing the contemplative spirit of the works.

Today had seemed no different than the several days that had gone before it. Perhaps it was the rat, lying by the quayside in the low tide -- bloated, abandoned, a carcass. As carefully displayed upon the shingle as a Beuys vitrine, it was framed by

a Curly Wurly wrapper and a Starbuck's cup, lying on a short plank. The wood had been greyed by the river's patient sanding and staining. It contrasted with the rat's piebald colors. In its way, it had been beautiful.

I wondered what had killed it -- or even if a rat might take its own life when all hope seemed to be past. They were intelligent creatures after all. Is suicide a measure of intelligence, I pondered later as I drank in the heavy red of the paintings. The red on the canvas before me seemed as dark as menstrual blood, that monthly reminder of having failed once again. The black rectangular shape within the blood marked a pollution like drunken diarrhea.

I was not aware of being particularly bothered by these thoughts. It was just another day in the Tate, until I heard that shrill cry. It filled me with panic, but I didn't know how to stop it. People were staring at me, but I couldn't move. I just sat there, gripping the seat of the bench with my straining fingers. After a time, as a crowd gathered, security came and the very nice woman pried my fingers from the wood and the quiet gentleman shifted the crowd aside.

A small girl cried, tears streaming down her pinkened cheeks. It made me sad that she might associate art with pain, so I smiled at her as they led me by. Sometimes a small act of kindness can do so much.

(K. A. Laity © 2009)

A Writer's Tale

By G.K. Wuori

Writers learn to take rejection about the way a baseball batter learns to take striking out. It has to happen. Nobody hits the long (or short) ball every time. Still, the incidence smarts. We'd all like to be successful all the time.

So I sent "Boom Boom and Maheska" out to this little journal called *The Crescent Review* in Fayetteville, North Carolina. I liked the story although I don't

know that I would put it on my Top Twenty list. Nevertheless, it had done what it was supposed to do and was ready to find its place in the publishing world.

On the other hand, *The Crescent Review* wasn't exactly *The New Yorker*, either. Just one of those little journals out there that hardly anyone ever reads, filled with stories and poems and essays that truly shouldn't go unread.

Nearly all magazines and literary journals are notorious for eating up the calendar between the time a piece is received and the time they finally make a decision on whether to accept or reject the piece. There are many reasons for this, not the least being that most journals have very small staffs and receive huge numbers of submissions, often in the hundreds each month. Giving everything a fair read and then selecting what they think is appropriate for their journal -- well, it takes time.

That long wait is frustrating for writers, but you try to be sympathetic and understanding about the editor's travails. Frankly, you're not even allowed to think bad thoughts as time goes by because you don't want to jinx the story.

I received "Boom Boom" back in the mail today -- no note, no rejection letter or slip filled with heartfelt inanities as to how it was truly wonderful but gosh darn it the thing just isn't what they need right now. Nothing. Just the story.

As I said, I got the rejected story back in the mail today, August 7, 2009. I mailed it to *The Crescent Review* on September 20, 2000.

I am such a patient person.
(G. K. Wuori © 2009)

Polish Sisu

By John Byk

Sitting across plates of sliced ham, kielbasa, bigos, rye bread and other culinary

treats, the discussion with my Polish immigrant cousin on a sultry Chicago summer night turned to the topic of the day—health care reform.

“I don’t have to worry much,” I told them. “I rarely get sick.”

“That’s because you are a ‘byk’,” she replied.

What she meant was that my last name in Polish means ox—one of the most sturdiest and reliable creatures in the animal kingdom. Now I’m not sure if my appellation has anything to do with my physical constitution. I may have just been the brunt of a convenient pun over drinks during a backyard barbecue but the fact remains that I seldom experience a sniffle and I have never had any major health issues in my life. My father, who came directly from Poland, never spent a night in a hospital bed until he was 93 years old at the time of his death. He was tough in body, mind, and spirit having survived the Great Depression as a cook and railroad hobo, working the mines in northern Ontario. I only saw him sick once, stretched out on the bed when he was 75 years old. His skin turned yellow and my mother stood beside him, chiding him and egging him on to his grave. They were fighting and that was probably the cause of his brief malaise since my mother was exactly the opposite of him and she had been constantly ill for as long as I could remember. Her brief moment of triumph over him that day was short lived because she passed away painfully and slowly a few years later.

I have often wondered whether I am like my father—sturdy, stubborn, and resolute—or more like my mother who was emotional and fickle. So when I moved to Michigan’s western Upper Peninsula last year to retire from teaching and begin writing in earnest, I knew that my character

would be tested, especially during the long, hard winter months that were sometimes not fit for man nor beast. I had heard the Finnish word “sisu” before since I attended Northern Michigan University and made friends with some of the locals and I had a vague understanding of all the connotations that the term implied. I even watched a YouTube video about “sisu” which showed a man ferociously digging a hole with a shovel, cursing remarkably as only the Finnish can in the mother tongue before he finally gave up, violently throwing the shovel to the ground without losing an ounce of dignity. It seemed to me that only in the spirit of “sisu” can defeat be so brilliantly portrayed. Would he come back to finish the job later? Or did he decide that his strength should be put to better use elsewhere?

I had an uncontrollable urge to pick up that shovel and continue where he left off even if it meant that I would be digging my own grave. If I did, I could only cuss in Polish like my parents taught me.

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