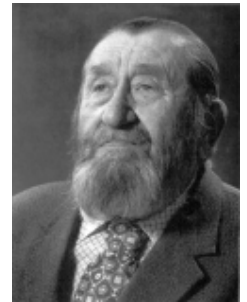


Part 2/3:

Memoirs of Matti Hopia: 1948–1951

Edited by Jenn Ashton



... *Continued from the previous issue*

We went to an employment office and found work right away at a farm. First we all ended up in the same place, 4 men and 2 women. The women were my wife and my brother's daughter Elvi, but they were there only for a week, since the farmer didn't pay them. They cooked and cleaned but he said it wasn't up to him to pay, so we went back to the ship. Kamppi, Sorse and Pertti stayed on to work on the farm. We went to the employment office again and I told them the women don't want to work without pay, and no one wanted to pay them. We ended up waiting once again for work.

Elvi got a training position in the hospital, and I got an offer for a sailor's job on an Estonian ship that sailed under the British flag. I went to London to Soritok harbor. At the same time a ship came in that had a Finnish Canadian on board, Toivo Syrjanen. He had been badly wounded in the face during the war. He was married to a Scottish lady, who didn't like Canada. So Topi decided to leave her in Scotland, which he did.

I had good luck when Topi came into the same cabin. We cleaned it for three days because it was like a pigpen, since Englishmen had lived there before us. But then we began filling out papers, but I stopped, since it meant my family would be left in England. Then Topi didn't want to go either. By then my permission had been granted, but I decided not to go. I had already agreed with Topi to make preparations to go to Canada with our ship, even though it was already late in October. So preparations began on the ship.

We needed a lot more supplies, safety rafts and (a) water tank. 30 tons of it. We took sweetened water and counted that it would last us, but I doubted that since this devilish motor took so much of it. I can't recollect what all we had to get before leaving England. I (had) heard that the sea regulations were strict, and (they) sure seemed to be, and I suppose in some ways that's

good. And I still want to thank the English for all the help we got. Most of it was free too.

A sea Captain, who was a pensioner, helped in everything. He also warned us, that when we left at the end of October that 'You'll never see Canada'. He said it was the worst time on the Atlantic. We didn't believe him however, and we left on October 30th, in the morning, to go out (and) see from the Channel. We had gone about four hours, when a terrible storm blew up. We couldn't manage to go forward at all, and the storm brought us closer to the German shore, so we decided to go back to Lowestoft, if they would permit us to. It took us 6 hours, even though the city lights were clearly in sight. When we got back to the shelter of the harbor, the desire to (sail) the seas, subsided for a while.

Later on we heard that the American war base, was sending a bigger ship than the Anja, to bring 130 men to the movies, but it sank and no one survived. We had seen the lights of the same ship when we turned back to the harbor. I don't know what saved us.

When we returned to the harbor, there were hundreds of people (there to) congratulate us on our safe return. Once again we searched and found work. Sorsa and Kamppi were able to return to their's on the farm. Elma, my wife, got work in the fish-canning factory. The children were put in school. Pertti and I ended up on the same farm about 200 miles from the ship.

We got a house to live in, but no food. There were only 4 rooms. It had a fireplace that heated the whole house, and no electric lights. There was a hot stone burner on the way in, where we could warm up water, as well as do all the laundry. All the cooking had to be done on the coals. We weren't able to get but 2 sacks of coal rocks a month, which would only last a few weeks. We came up with the idea of getting firewood, which they had quite close to us on the farm. We got a 'juusteri' saw and an axe from the farmhouse. On Saturdays, after work, we chopped a week's supply of firewood.

The pines were big and dry like 'kelohonka' trees in Finland. So every night we had a crackling fire in the fire place, and the coals burned all night, if we put them on before going to bed. In the morning I was always able to get the fire going without sticks. The morning awakening was up to me, as well as the breakfasts and lunches. Pertti was young, and the work tired him out so much, poor boy, but I was at my best age and took all of this quite easily.

Then we had food worries. All of the food was on ration cards in England (in 19) 48-49. Bread, salt, potatoes and cabbage could be bought freely, but jams were rationed. One was given a meat serving a week, which ended up being a see-through slice of pig's meat or bacon. It was a week's supply, which we ate in one sitting. I made laski soosi, it didn't have much meat, but it tasted good. We got a few chicken eggs I guess, and then there was a serving of butter. There was no margarine. We got a little bit of bread that kept us going, even though it was white.

It was good that there were a lot of wild rabbits, but since we didn't have a gun, we took the farm's dog for a friend. On Sunday mornings, it knew we made meat and it came to the door, scratching, to tell us it was time to go hunting. We took the same wooden paddles, and never thought of looking for a new place to hunt. I don't have any idea how the dog always found the rabbits. He went down the same trails and when we sat down in our places, the rabbits jumped into our laps. We never missed. The dog always got his portion too, to ensure he (would) come again the next time. Sometimes we found chicken eggs in the field, which we drank raw if we had a chance, for nutrition, since our load was heavy. The white bread and 'tii', didn't nourish us much, but that's how it went.

Now I'll tell you a little bit of the work and the pay in (19) 48 and 49. On the farm we worked a 7-5 day, with an hour lunch break, and on Saturdays 7-12. The pay was 4 and a half pounds a week. In the factory the

women got better pay, as my wife Elma got six and a half pounds a week.

We began picking sugar beets. There was Pertti, myself and two Englishmen. The boss drove us grandly far into the field, and showed us how the beet is taken from the ground, the tops cut and thrown into another pile. Each one of us took two rows to have enough room to work. That all lasted a few months. The other two fellows left as soon as the boss left, and went to sleep on the sidelines, indicating for us to come too. Of course we didn't go, but pressed on to work. Half an hour later the boss returned. We had our

rows done quite a ways, but the others didn't do anything. There was a loud outcry, and the other fellows were taken away by the boss. We never saw them again at that work place. So we worked there just the two of us, except when there was manure piling, or wheat threshing, otherwise, we were alone.

One time, something happened that could have easily cost us our last paycheque. We were driving manure. One horse was quite stubborn at times and began backing up at will, and there was nothing one could do about it. The farmhand started to

lead him, but the horse stopped by the gate, and began backing up, knocking down the other pole, the boss happened to come by just then, and hit the farm hand first on one cheek, and then the other, so I jumped in between with pitchfork in hand, indicating and saying to him that 'one more time, and I would poke him in the stomach with the pitchfork'. As I began loading manure onto the wagon, the boss fled and we didn't see him at all for the rest of the day. The fellows shook hands and slapped me on the back saying 'veri kut poi'. But Pertti was almost certain that the boss went to get our last paycheque. The matter however, was never discussed again. The work continued and we had found two good friends in a foreign land. These friends wanted us to visit their homes, so every Sunday we went to see them and had good tea and sand-



Pentti Hopia and friend, Lowestoft, England 1948.

wiches. We didn't know much of the language, but got along fine nonetheless.

Then there was another incident that humored us for a long time. Since we had no electricity, we took the oil for the lamps from the farmhouse. We had to use the oil lamps, and the owner billed us for this at 11 shillings for three quarters of a bottle. In those days that was a high price to pay. That's eight dollars a pound. We wondered why lamp oil was so expensive. Then I visited the ship and spoke of this, and was told that lamp oil costs 4 pence a gallon. I decided to confront the boss regarding this matter, and so Monday morning, before work, we gathered together. I took a long piece of straw and bent it in as many knots as I possibly could. I went to the boss and said, 'tis is juu, ai tont laik taat'. I straightened the straw and said, 'ai laik taat'. Then gave him a piece of paper that had the price of lamp oil a gallon. The boss was very sorry and promised to give some back. From then on, we got oil for our lamp for free. Again Pertti felt we'd get fired, but nothing like that occurred. In fact, the boss would have wanted us to stay on there the rest of our lives.

Then at the end of April, it was time for us to leave. We decided to sail again. A bus passed right by the corner of the farmhouse, that would have taken us to the ship, but the boss wouldn't let us take it. He brought us in a magnificent car to the ship, a distance of about 200 miles. He said he had never had such good workers, and told us if we came back we would always have a job. The other bosses said the same thing, and the newspaper ran an article on how the Finns were able to do all kinds of work. This is true. I even did all the mechanic's work when something broke. I just took it all apart to show what needed a new part. I also did all the work of a carpenter. They were amazed how I had the ability to do all the things. Elvi had told them that no one could manage at our place if they didn't have several trades.

Now we had more people on board the ship, because we had run an advertisement in the paper. We had plans to go to Argentina, because one could get in without a passport or a visa. We took on 7 more men for the manpower we needed. Two of them Finns, one and Englishman, and four Estonians. The Englishman had served in the Navy for three years, but was seasick the whole time. He spent the entire trip in bed. He was no help to us. When we stopped in Portugal to get more food supplies, this lad fled inland and didn't

come back to the ship. We weren't able to leave until he was found. You see, Portugal's law is like this: we were given three days to look for him. We made several pleas for him to come back, by radio and the newspapers, so we could leave port. Finally he came and promised to go back to England. The police took him into custody and we were permitted to leave Oporto.

Then there was the engineer, Pantus, an Estonian boy who didn't lift his head from the pillow for the whole trip. He remained in Dakar, Africa, where we sold the ship. However, we ended up paying for a trip ticket for him before we could leave. The same thing went for all who stayed, we had to pay (for) their trip tickets if they didn't leave the country right away.

Now returning once again to our departure from England. The canal was a difficult place since we didn't have a sea chart. Once in low tide, we almost drove over a shipwreck, or at least Anja's bottom hit something a few times, but we never got stuck. We looked for the Yarmouth harbor because we had to take on a few men from there, but they didn't come. We waited for a few days until a very bad storm hit and they wouldn't let us out. We stayed in the harbor for a night and two days. In the early evening we left Yarmouth, which was our last stop in England.

The next stop was Oporto, Portugal, which I already mentioned earlier. We left Oporto about noon. The seas were quite rough, but the wind was in our favor when we turned our course towards Biscay. We sailed quite smoothly with the wind holding the sails quite tightly, so the speed was good. We reached the Bay of Biscay in the evening, but by now there was a side wind, that eventually turned into a storm. We had to lower the sail and tried to run with only the engine power, but the storm only got worse and Anja's motor just couldn't hold its course. We decided to swing around and go into the shelter of the Bay. The storm was so powerful we came very close to driving on a reef, because the ship couldn't stay on course.

Then we blundered in the turn. The big anchor got loose and the chain followed it, pounding on Anja's side. It pounded so hard, I thought it would break a hole in the bow. I called for help, but the Estonian boys stayed in the ship's cabin, calling to God for help. No one came to help me as I fought the waves with the anchor. At times I was even on the outside of the ship. By some miracle, I managed to tie the anchor into a knot. Just then, Pertti came to help me, when he saw my life was in

danger, so we fastened the anchor and turned Anja around again. I can't understand what kept Anja from falling, when she was actually on her side many time, but (she) rose again.

We sailed back into the Bay again, there was a little island that sheltered us from the wind. We were able to spend the night there, even though all night I feared that the chain on the anchor would break. Then we would have been on the rocks and this trip would have ended (there). I didn't sleep at all that night because we were so close to the reef.

In the morning the storm was over and the wind had changed direction. Now it was blowing in our direction, so we left France's shores and tried again for the Bay of Biscay. This time it was easier. We put up all three sails so Anja's speed was 15 knots. Over and above this, it took us 18 days of sailing in the far sea. I didn't want to struggle along the rocky shore. Then Viren found it hard to lie down, so we took another route and sailed all afternoon and night, in the same direction that brought us closer to the shore.

We came to the Sahara's sandy, vast plains, where we found a fishing village close by. There, we were met by the Foreign Legion. Our water was running out and we would have taken more, but we couldn't because all the water was flown in from far away by airplane. The oil too, was low, and we didn't have much money. So the Legion's Captain, wired Dakar's Shell Oil Company. From where they sent us two barrels of 'Naxtao', and 50 litres of motor oil. When the Legion's supplies came, our stuff came too at the same time, and we were able to pay for them in Dakar.

All of this took a week so we had a chance to familiarize ourselves with the practices of the Legion, the Arab people, and the sand storms that surprised us many times. This was due to the fact that we didn't hurry at all too much when the warnings came, but we learned quite fast when we got our pockets full of sand and our eyes and ears too. The fish were so plentiful that we could fish as much as we wanted to from the deck of the ship. And they were so good.



The Anja in Dakar, Senegal, Africa August 3rd, 1949.

We also got a glimpse of what kind of poverty people lived in, even in 1949. The camels too were pathetic to behold. All they had for food was rotten rye straw. As far as we could see, the people seemed to only eat fish and lived in metal shacks with sod floors. There the mother would dig a hole for them to do their business. I'm not sure if they didn't want to go outside, or if they were afraid of the sandstorms. The drinking water was stored in a sheepskin sheath that had wool on the outside. The men were experts at ripping others off. Someone would talk in front, while the others would empty pockets. There go the watches and money from our boys.

Once we let three Arabs on Anja's deck and we don't know how they found time to clean up everything from small fishing lines to coffee mugs and all. From then on, the Arab's weren't allowed on Anja's deck. The Legion's Captain had warned us not to let anyone on, (as) they were capable of taking a life if they saw something of value, especially when there were few people around. He recommended that we gather in groups to discourage the stealing. He told us that they don't care if all they get is a few dollars for a life. 'So it's away with you and into the sand you go'. That seemed to be all there was to it.

When things were in order once again, we started out in good weather, away from the Sahara's sandy shores. We sailed for three days along the Atlantic's blue surface. We finally came to Dakar, where Anja's

trip ended, and so did my responsibility and worry that I had borne the whole journey. We put Anja up for sale, since we didn't have any more money to continue. I had sacrificed a million, 600 thousand Finnish marks already on this voyage, and my measure was rather full by now. We had to wait two months before a Portuguese man came and bought Anja, for the bottom price. Since there was no other competition, he set the price and we left Anja.

We moved out of the ship and into the 'Emigrant Hotel', where we had to pay for everything ourselves. Then the waiting began. We had heard about a refugee ship that had stopped by here for food and water supplies, for crossing the Atlantic, so we asked the police Chief, to notify us when such a ship arrived. Three of them in fact came, after two months of wait, and they didn't require passports or visas, but they were on their way to Venezuela. Two of them were very small and I didn't want to go with them, besides, my whole group wouldn't have fit anyway. So I stayed to wait for a better opportunity.

I'll tell you of the troubles we had in selling Anja, since we couldn't speak the language. French, Portuguese and English would have been useful then. Kamppi knew a bit of French and we used English with the help of translator books that we had picked up during the trip. Kamppi and Sorsa took a loan against the ship using the French he knew, which really gave us more trouble in selling the ship. But then a man came up to me and asked if I spoke Russian. I told him that I did. Then the matters began to run more smoothly, and the fellows could no longer flub things as they had planned.

This boy's name was Jonaton. At least, that's the name he used, and that's what I called him. He said he had served in the Russian Army as a radio communicator, and I certainly don't doubt that, for he spoke six languages so fluently that no one would guess that he was a foreigner. I am forever grateful to him, for his help to me the whole time. In the sale of the ship, and in so many other affairs. He did a great service in a manner no one else could have done. At one point he exchanged colonial franks into dollars. We had talked to the governo, but he drove us away when he heard of the matter at hand. But Jonaton went back and I don't know what he discussed, but I was called back and give an address and a letter that I was to give to the bank Director. It was a cheque

in American dollars, which I changed later in Venezuela, South America.

Once again I had a chance to look at Dakar and its surroundings, as well as (in) the city itself. Its people 80% were black people. Dakar was a pretty city, but the black people wanted to mar its reputation for some reason, and did their 'business' in the streets. Even though outhouses were available, they didn't use them. They didn't want to be bothered with anything, and even though the outhouses cost them nothing, they continued to do their small and bigger business on the streets. It smelled so badly, that the whites could hardly walk by. The same thing occurred in the harbor where Anja was docked. They came to do their business right under the window of the ship. One time when we were eating, someone came and crouched down his rear, right in front of the window, so I threw a hot potato at his rear and he fled letting out quite a cry, and ran to an outhouse that was 50 metres away. We didn't see anyone else come near Anja that day.

One day the harbor workers were taking apart a cement load from the ship, and the time came for lunch. They brought out a bean porridge of sorts. They took the broken cement sacks, spread them on the dock, and poured the porridge on it. Then they sat around in a circle and ate. It was eaten with a ladle, no spoons. It was a rather odd sight at first, but when I saw a lot of other things, it really was no wonder anymore. The park had magnificent benches, but there were signs posted on them, warning you 'not to sit on them, there is lice'. So I checked it out to see if it's true and there certainly were a lot of them scampering about.

The same thing was seen in the restaurants, where the blacks were forbidden entry. Such restrictions seem odd, but were essential, as they didn't seem to want to get up by themselves or anything. Such restrictions were to keep the places clean. In the evening, one had to be careful walking the streets at night, because entire families would be sleeping there. And the window indentations were full of sleepers because it was so warm that one perspired all night long, even without blankets.

One day, my son and wife and I went to see the countryside. We drove by bus for a few kilometers and got off at a nice spot to look for mangos and bananas, which we found. But we also lost our direction in doing so, and couldn't find our way back to the road. We ended up in a negro village, where we heard this

dreary music playing. I went in and asked for Dakar, and a man came out and indicated to a path from the village. We headed out on to it, when two young girls came towards us on the path, and proceeded to do their business right in front of us. We couldn't get past them, as there were thick bushes on either side. We had to wait until the girls got up and stepped aside. Finally we found a highway along which we walked,

back to the city. When the police chief heard of this trip, he said we were very lucky to be alive, for many have disappeared on such trips and have not left a trace behind. He warned us never to go off again to the outskirts of town.

To be continued in the next issue ...

Matkakertomus Okinawalta 10–20.7.2009

Minulla oli heinäkuussa tilaisuus yhdessä professori em. Guy Bäckmanin kanssa tehdä tutkimusvierailu Okinawalle. Prof. Bäckman tutkii hyvinvointia ja vanhenemista Japanissa, ja minun tutkimusaiheeni on siirtolaisuus ja terveys, joka liittyy seuraavaan tutkimusprojektiin.

Tärkeimmät yhteyshenkilömme Okinawalla olivat apulaisprofessori Kokoro Shirai ja professori Hidemi Todoriki Ryukyun yliopistosta. Tapasimme japanilaisia tutkijoita ja kolusimme kirjastoja, etsimme tutkimuskirjallisuutta ja keräsimme tilastoja joita ei muualla ole saatavilla. Vierailimme myös Okinawa International Universityssä Ginowan-cityssä.

Ajoimme autolla Okinawan pohjois-osaan, Oгими-nimiseen kylään. Ogimissa asuu eniten yli satavuotiaita maailmassa. Teimme siellä pari antoisaa haastattelua. Oli mielenkiintoista, että kaikki satavuotiaat olivat asuneet koko ikänsä samassa paikassa. Muualta tulleiden ja muualle muuttaneiden terveys ei vaikuta poikkeavan japanilaisesta keskitasosta, minkä sekä tilastot että haastattelut vahvistavat. Sain myös tietää, että Ogimiin on muuttanut useita toisen ja kolmannen polven siirtolaisia takaisin (kibesei, nisei), sekä pohjoisesta että eteläisestä Amerikasta, mutta myös Hawajjilta. Tämä paluumuutto on niin uusi ilmiö, ettei sitä vielä tilastoissa näy.

Ryukyn yliopistossa on tutkimuslaitos nimeltä ”Imin kenkyu sentaa”, eli Center for Migration Studies (CMSUR). Professori Todoriki istuu sen hallituksessa ja professori Machida johtaa sitä. Tutkimuskeskus perustettiin vuonna 2003 edistämään japanilaisen siirtolaisuuden tutkimista ja dokumentointia. Okinawa on nimittäin Japanin prefektuuri josta lähtenyt eniten siirtolaisia. Vuodesta 1978 siirtolaisuutta

on tutkittu paljon, ja CMSUR on kerännyt tutkimustietoa ja rakentanut tietokantoja. Lisäksi keskus julkaisee tieteellistä lehteä ”Immigration Studies” noin kerran vuodessa (pääosin japaniksi).

CMSUR ei vielä ole tutkimuslaitos samalla tavalla kuin Siirtolaisuusinstituutti. Sillä ei ole omia tiloja tai päätoimisia työntekijöitä. Tilanne on kuitenkin muuttumassa kuluvana vuonna. Ryukyun yliopiston tutkimuslaitokset yhdistetään hallinnollisesti ”Institute of international Okinawan Studies” alaisuuteen (CMSUR, Institute for American Studies, Institute for Okinawa Islands Culture Studies, Pacific Health Research Institute). Prof. Todoriki kertoi, että CMSUR:ille on luvassa omat tilat ja henkilökunta. Lupasin pitää yhteyttä ja rakentaa tutkimusyhteistyötä Siirtolaisuusinstituutin kanssa; he ovat kiinnostuneita meidän tietämyksestämme ja kokemuksestamme.

Krister Björklund



Vasemmalta H. Todoriki, K. Björklund, G. Bäckman ja K. Shirai 19.7.2009 Nahassa.