

**(18 February Speech in honor of the occasion: The Finland 100 gala, the Marriott Hotel, Florida.)**

Ladies and gentlemen, dear Finns and friends of Finland,

When I was young, I thought that the world was to be found somewhere out there, far away. Now, however, I'm old enough to realize that the world is round: the further away we go, the closer we get to our own roots.

Each of us has our own story of how we got here, under the Florida sun. Some of you have lived here for generations, others have just recently arrived. Some among you have decided to build their whole lives here, while others, like me, are more like migratory birds, coming and going.

But I'm sure that many of you know the feeling well: the further away from your homeland you live, the more important your own roots become.

And in Florida, roots grow firmly into the sandstone. The ground that is typical of this region is porous, it breathes: the rock is soft, with coral and chalk deposits. In Finland the ground is hard moraine: dense and rough rock that lets very little water pass through.

These two types of ground also seem to nicely describe the differences between Finnish and American society. The porous structure of the American society was formed by immigrants from a vast range of cultures. It consists of innumerable communities living amongst each other. By contrast, Finnish culture is close-packed and homogeneous, just like the ground

there. This remains so despite the increased immigration of recent decades.

But just like rock and soil, human communities are also composed of many different layers. The first Finn to set foot in the New World was a sailor, Maunu Anderson, who sailed to the Delaware River delta aboard a Swedish ship in 1640. In the decades after him, a few hundred other Finns made their way to the same region.

This first Finnish community did not succeed in holding on to its native language and culture. Instead, they quite quickly adopted the lifestyle and language of the English Quakers who had also come to the region. What is interesting is that the English often employed the Finnish settlers as mediators in their dealings with the local Native American Indians. In other words, the history of Finnish peace mediation goes back further than most people realize!

The first Finnish immigrants, as with the later generations, found themselves having to consider their own identity and how they would cope in the new culture. Sociologists of migration have argued that the Finnish immigrants to the United States have, at different stages of that history, adopted one of four different strategies of adjusting to life in the new society.

The first strategy is simply waiting, which is what many of the Finnish settlers who came to the US at the end of the 19th century chose to do. These immigrants thought they had come to the country only for a few years or so. They did not want to adapt to the new culture. They were waiting until the time

came to return home. In a letter to the folks back home in Northern Finland in 1882, a Finnish miner put it this way:

“All the jobs are taken. A strange country, a foreign language. I owe money for several tickets. So it would be best for everyone who’s planning to move here to think of his own best interests, not of the famous name of America. I’ll be coming back home as soon as I can.”

The second strategy was resigning oneself to one’s fate. This was typical of many immigrants in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They had made it to America, where a life had to be built, and where they had to accept the inevitable. These people often lived in the past, in their memories. And they become so strongly attached to other Finns that they didn’t even want to learn English. One Finn who emigrated to New Hampshire in 1905 described the local Christmas traditions in a letter to his parents back home:

“Are you having a happy Christmas, and were there any soirées or dances on Christmas Day? Here we got a Christmas tree for the Finnish meeting room, and there we recited poetry and sang songs and hymns. I pictured a charming Christmas, as if it were real and right before my eyes. But how bitter it felt when I remembered that those with whom I was enjoying that magical Christmas were far away – so horribly far away!”

The third strategy for coping with life in the new country was forgetting. This meant cutting off their Finnish roots, and in their place adopting American culture as completely as possible. A Finnish man named Eemil Aalto wrote to a friend back in Finland at the start of the last century:

“I’m a genuine American by nature. This is so real. Here I feel myself at home. If I didn’t, then I wouldn’t be able to hold my own against the others here. People here are definitely more enthusiastic about making money than in Finland. People work for their dollars, and every single person here works.”

This excellent example of forgetting one’s own culture was published in the Duluth News-Tribune in 1918. The article described the Finnish immigrants to the United States, and mentioned a young Finnish man who spoke English to everybody – even to his own mother, who didn’t understand a word of English!

The fourth and final way of coping in the new culture was renewal. This entailed creating a new identity, one in which Finnishness and Americanness existed side by side. This atmosphere can be found in many Florida homes. True to the American style the houses are big, with many bedrooms, and the decor is fabulous and roomy. But you’re likely to find a reindeer pelt hanging on the wall, or a wooden moose on the window sill, or Iittala tableware, or Marimekko towels in the bathroom.

I’m sure that you have all met these types of people: those who are just waiting out their time, those who have surrendered, those who have forgotten, those who have renewed themselves. Every immigrant chooses his or her own way of adapting and coping, and the choice is not always even an individual one. Because it certainly seems that certain social tendencies affect how people relate to a new culture.

One such tendency is that one’s children often forget, but one’s grandchildren remember. Many of the first children of the first

generation of immigrants wanted so strongly to internalize the ways of the new country that they had no care for maintaining the culture of their parents. *Their* children, however, would in time often become interested in their grandparents' roots. These changes across the generations are no doubt well known in the Finnish community in Florida as well.

This year, all of us Finns and friends of Finland recall our historical roots, and we celebrate the centenary of Finland's independence. Our country's story is a wonderful one of a country that developed from an impoverished agrarian society into one of the world's most advanced countries. You yourselves are part of this story. Each of you who has come to this occasion has, in your own place and in your own way, worked for the good of independent Finland. For this, I am deeply thankful.