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KEEPING THE ICE OPEN

"Thy blossom, in the bud laid low, yet ripened shall upspring.
See! From our love once more shall grow
Thy light, thy joy, thy hope, thy glow!
And clearer yet one day shall ring The song our land shall sing."

This is one translation to English of the words in one of the verses of the Finnish National Anthem, normally sung as the second verse. In Finnish it reads:

"Sun kukoistukses kuorestaan kerrankin puhkeaa!
Viel' lempemme saa nousemaan
Sun toivos, riemus loistossaan
Ja kerran laulus, synnynmaa, korkeammam kaiun saa!"

It is my favorite verse, and it is beautiful also in Swedish, as the Finnish poet Runeberg wrote it in 1846. It was sung for the first time at a student’s gathering in May 1848, and it was part of the growth of the country’s national identity. As was Kalevala, published by Lonnrot in 1835, of which we have been especially reminded this 150th anniversary year, not only as the national epic based on a rich fund of folklore, but a manifest of the Finnish language, boosting the national awareness.

The day our Finnish forefathers must have had in mind for the song to sound yet clearer or higher, came seventy years later, when on December 6, 1917, Finland declared itself an independent state, taking advantage of the Bolshevik Revolution in the autumn of that year.
It may seem as a natural development for a people that for centuries had gone about doing its things in its own quiet ways, far from the major metropolitan centers, despite being officially ruled by foreign powers. But it took wisdom and courage from our grandparents to take the step, and then follow it through in a period of world turmoil. When we celebrate the Finnish Independence Day today, it is also a Day of Thanksgiving to those that established it.

America’s independence is celebrated on a warm summer day with loud fireworks brightening up the sky. This is the way we here, together with immigrants from many other lands, wish to express our joy of freedom in a land, to which we came for many reasons, many of our forefathers to get away from political darkness or hunger in their respective homelands. It is a land that permits, even encourages, its various people to maintain their ethnic background and culture. It allows us today to express ourselves proudly also as Finns, although most of us are Americans in this great new homeland. Permit me to tell an anecdote I recently heard. It was about an old Indian Chief that wrote to the US President some twenty years ago "Be careful in designing and applying your immigration laws, we were not."

The Finnish way of Independence celebration is typical of the Finnish character. It is a tradition to light candles in the windows of private and public buildings on the evening of December 6. Finns had used this method in silent protest against Russian harrassment in the early years of this century, when they were not allowed to assemble and publicly voice their dissatisfaction. Also in the evening of December 6, thousands of students and others march quietly, with lighted torches, through the city streets to Senate Square in Helsinki. The "quiet Finn" is a characteristic not only for the individuals, as told in so many stories, but also of the nation as a whole.
And it is about the quiet way Finland has gone about maintaining and strengthening its independence that I would like to comment today. It is not only important to successfully launch a ship, and keep it floating, it must be able to carry heavy loads, and withstand storms on the often wavy seas and international waters. I would like to believe that Finland's independence is as strong as the icebreakers it builds, and is famous for.

Small Finland was not much known to the world when it emerged as a sovereign nation. In this country, Finnish immigrants had gained respect as hardworking and honest people, and built the foundation that was enhanced when also the nation became known as the one, perhaps the only one, that paid its debts. This positive reputation was of utmost importance, when Finland and its industry, not accepting free aid, needed to borrow money to rebuild and expand rapidly.

Finnish architects and designers also brought fame, not only to themselves, but to their country, at the same time strengthening the moral at home. And Finnish athletes brought home Olympic gold medals and put SUOMI on the world map. At sports events, the national anthem, Maamme Laulu, is again sung clear and high, sometimes more loud than clear.

As an engineer, I am of course personally more familiar with the industrial development of the country. The forest has traditionally been Finland's main natural resource. In the beginning we exported logs, then lumber, then pulp, then paper and lately very high grade specialty papers, thus continuously increasing the "value added" at home to our resource base. Today, Finland is a world leader also in producing pulp and paper machinery, with recent successes also in North America. Similarly, in the energy field, Finland has had to develop unique solutions to combat the high cost of imported fossil fuels. Examples are district heating, cogeneration, and the use of wood waste and peat for energy production. My company, EKONO, has had a role in this
development, which has received worldwide interest now when resources of all kinds, including money, are getting scarce. These are just a few examples of Finnish technology in the forefront. Perhaps better known are the icebreakers and the "Love Boats." Oil drilling rigs and electronics are also high on the list. And did you know that Finland was the first country to produce 40% of its electricity from nuclear power, drastically reducing the cost of imported fuel. The plants were built on schedule and within budget.

I mention this, because a small country has to find its niche in the world trade. And international trade provides one third of the Finnish gross national product, one of the highest portions anywhere. Recent economic successes have also given reason to sing "Mämmä Laulu" clear and high, again and again. And this is important in today's context, since I believe trade, in addition to cultural exchange, is a key factor in promoting understanding and peaceful relations between nations. Finland has long established trade relations with the Scandinavian countries and the Western industrial world, including membership in the European free-trade area (EFTA) and a free-trade treaty with the European Economic Community.

Finland's major trading partners are Sweden, Soviet Union, England, Germany and the USA. The fact that trade with Russia amounts to about twenty percent of the total trade is sometimes confusing to outsiders, and taken as a sign of "dependence", as one of the ingredients for the expression "Finlandization".

The events of 1939-1945 are well known to all of you. The Winter War 1939-40 brought Finland into the spotlight as an example of "fighting spirit" and "sisu". We are again indebted to our parents, many of you "older folks" here, and for some of you your grandparents, for standing steadfast, and united, including the Swede-Finns, to avoid the greatest threat so far to Finland's independence.
Finland emerged from the wars a crippled nation. Yet while defeated, it had not been conquered. Countries liberated by the allies are now members of NATO. All the countries "liberated" by the Soviet Union are members of the Warsaw Pact. The only countries which remain outside the two blocs are those which managed to stay out of the war, plus two: Finland and Yugoslavia. The outcome of the war made it possible for Finland to approach the task of creating a new relationship with the Soviet Union, without the resentment that follows from humiliation, on the basis of mutual respect. Relations would probably be different, had not the entire population of the ceded areas voluntarily left their homes and moved into and settled in the remaining Finland. The nation remained undivided.

The Finnish policy of neutrality and the Soviet concern for security have been married in the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance concluded in 1948. It is a political statement describing the way Finland wishes to conduct her foreign relations, not only in some future conflict, but here and now: to keep out of conflicts between the blocs, and to decide independently how to react to shifting international situations. There should not be so much fuss about this formal relationship to the east, since there is no symmetry in Finlands relations with the Western world on the one hand and the socialist countries on the other. The relations are structured differently. Finland is a Western country ideologically and culturally, and part of the Western economic system, and relations are thus organic. Cooperation with the socialist countries, across the ideological frontiers, is conducted in a more formalized matter.

I believe Finland has found its own unique neutrality, which despite its small size (one tenth of a percent of the world’s population) also can help break the ice in the world. It adds another dimension to her independence, assures its continuance and strengthening, and gives hope that the wish in the words of the quoted verse of our national anthem one day would come into fruition also for the world as a whole.
Let us be thankful that while allowed to live in the freedom of this country, we can be proud of the accomplishment of the "old country", and continue our individual efforts in the spirit (modifying some borrowed words) "Ask not what the world can do for you, but what you can do for the world."