Finlandia Foundation Seattle Chapter Newsletter

November 2025

@MARAT GALEEV

FINLANDIA FOUNDATION SEATTLE CHAPTER

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Members-at-Large serve two-year, staggered terms. 1st year terms begin July 1. Please send all membership inquiries, payments or changes of address to FFSC, PO Box 5024 Bellevue, WA 98009-5024 or e-mail info@finlandiafoundationseattle.com.

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Letter from the President

I was recently browsing past issues of the FFSC newsletter when I came across my November 2020 president's message. Reading it now feels surreal: "We are living in very unusual times and FFSC has, of course, not avoided the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. … Large in-person events cannot be held safely in 2020, at least in our part of the world, and thus the traditional Independence Day Dinner and Dance will be cancelled this year. Note that Linnan Juhlat – the Independence Day celebration held at the Presidential Palace in Finland – has also been cancelled this year."

It's remarkable how Covid feels like ancient history, yet it's been only a handful of years. Independence Day Dinner and Dance was cancelled again in 2021, and in 2022 we managed to host a scaled-down event for fewer than 60 people. It wasn't until two years ago that we truly returned to normal programming.

This year, we're celebrating Finland's Independence Day on December 6th at the National Nordic Museum — and we couldn't be more thrilled to host the event at such a fantastic venue! Seating is limited and tickets are selling quickly, so if you'd like to join us and haven't bought tickets yet, head to www.finlandiafoundationseattle.com soon to reserve your spot!

Before the Independence Day Dinner, there are several other events you might want to attend, including the 2nd Nordic Mixer – an evening of shared Nordic traditions on Friday, November 7th at 6 PM at the Leif Erikson Hall. The Leif Erikson Hall will also host the Finnish Holiday Market on Saturday November 15th at 10 AM. Entrance to both events is free.

The Independence Day Dinner and Dance (IDDD) and the Holiday Market have a long history in the Seattle area Finnish community. The Holiday Market – originally called the Finnish Community Bazaar – was first held in 1979 and has been held annually ever since, except during the Covid years. The origins of IDDD are more difficult to trace, though the dinner has certainly been a regular community event since well before the 1980s.

I hope to see you at these events.

Mikko Männistö

FFSC BOARD PRESIDENT

Letter from the Editor

Dear Friends,

The cozy holiday season is just around the corner, and we're excited to share two beloved Finnish traditions that bring our community together. First, the **Finnish Holiday Market**, returning on Saturday, November 15, at Leif Erikson Hall in Ballard, is more than a market, it's a place for our community to come together, support each other, and celebrate the season. For many local organizations, it's also one of the biggest fundraisers of the year. Enjoy handcrafted gifts from local makers, authentic Finnish baked goods, cheerful seasonal music, and family-friendly activities — including a special visit from Santa Claus (joulupukki)! This events is free to enter and 100% volunteer-run, the market is a wonderful way to connect, give back, and share in the warmth of the holidays.

Then, as we honor Finland's rich history and traditions, join us for the **Finnish Independence Day Dinner & Dance** on December 6 at the National Nordic Museum. Step into an evening of elegance and joy with a festive dinner, live performances, dancing, comedy and incredible raffle prizes! Showcase your national costume and celebrate the spirit, history, and vibrancy of our Finnish community. Tickets are now on sale, and with last year's celebration selling out quickly, we encourage you to secure your spot soon for this unforgettable evening.

These events highlight what makes our community so special, celebrating culture, connecting with one another, and supporting the organizations that keep our traditions alive. We hope to see you at both, enjoying the sights, sounds, and flavors that make our Finnish heritage so cherished!

Warm wishes,

Laura Galeev

FFSC NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Finlandia Foundation National

Explore the wonders of Finnish culture with Finlandia Foundation National's free monthly newsletter! Sign up for the E-News or dive into our archive to discover past issues. Start your Finnish journey today and start exploring at the Newsletter Archive: https://finlandiafoundation.org/e-news-newsletter!

The Three Questions


SANNA PARTANEN

Sanna Partanen moved four months ago from Helsinki to Seattle. She's a mother of three children, holds a PhD degree in Neuroscience, and has worked as an entrepreneur for 12 years. Additionally, she has taught medicine and business to students in Helsinki. Her hobbies are hiking, skiing, boating, knitting, reading, playing and listening to music, as well as art.

In this column, we interview fascinating Finnish individuals and explore their lives in the Seattle area. We asked Sanna Partanen our Three Questions and are excited to share her insights.

What brought you to Seattle, and what has your journey been like leading up to this move? My husband is an expert in RAIN RFID and has closely collaborated with a US semiconductor company headquartered in Seattle.

An opportunity emerged to take on a challenging role at that company, so I sold one of my businesses in Finland, and we moved here with our youngest child, who just started High School in Seattle.

The timing was perfect, especially since the older children moved out of the house at the same time and began university studies in Finland. Now I have the opportunity to be adventurous and invent something completely new in a new environment.

In your first months here, what kind of activities have you enjoyed the most, whether it's sports, concerts, hikes, or something else? Seattle is the perfect place for someone like me, who is interested in everything, very active, and loves mountains and the sea. During the first months, I have already hiked in all of the National Parks in Washington state, exploring forests, mountains, and beaches. I had a chance to go sailing in the sea and become acquainted with local sports, such as soccer, baseball, and hockey. Hiking has been the most fantastic experience. The places to go are endless, and the nature is so different from Finland. The most amazing and beautiful places I have seen so far have been Kalaloch Beach, Mount Rainier, and Snow Lake. Tide pools, sunsets, pelicans, meadows, snowy mountains, crystal clear lakes, and wildlife are just amazing.

What are your favorite places, activities, or small discoveries in Seattle / Pacific Northwest that you'd recommend to others in the Finnish community? Seattle and its surroundings are places of

opportunity. If you are open-minded and follow the news and social media for happenings and recommendations, you will never run out of things to do and experience. During my son's soccer training and games, I always get to know new places in the city. Discovery Park, Alki Beach, Magnolia Park, Arboretum, Seattle Art Museums, and farmers' markets are just a few examples of my favourite findings. I can hardly wait for rainy days when concerts, opera, and ballet performances are calling, and the snow, so we can go skiing at Crystal Mountain. But first, a caravan trip to the San Juan Islands, possibly to see some orcas and enjoy the fall colours on Mt. Baker trails.

Nordic Mixer, November 7, 2025 | Leif Erikson Hall, Seattle

When: Friday, November 7, 2025 | 5:30 – 9:00 PM
Where: Leif Erikson Hall, Seattle
Cost: Free

Come together for a festive evening at the Nordic Mixer, a social gathering that brings the Nordic community of Seattle under one roof! This time, the event will be hosted by the Norwegians at Leif Erikson Hall, carrying forward a tradition where different Nordic groups take turns organizing. (Last time, the Swedish Club was our gracious host!)

Expect an evening filled with live music from the **Winter Band**, a welcoming atmosphere, and the chance to mingle with friends, neighbors, and new faces who share a passion for Nordic culture and heritage. Food and drinks will be available for purchase, so come hungry and ready to enjoy.

Whether you have Nordic roots or simply an interest in the culture, the Nordic Mixer is the perfect opportunity to connect, celebrate, and share in a lively and friendly atmosphere right in the heart of Seattle. Mark your calendars, we look forward to seeing you there!

FINNFO – FACTS ABOUT FINLAND

Contributor: Gary London

12.4 Percent of Finns who report they have not received the healthcare they need.

2 Rank of Finland among EU counties whose citizens report they have not received the health care they need.

1/3 Fraction of Finns who support adding English as a language for the conduct of business.

3/4 Fraction of Finns who believe the Finnish language is an important part of Finnish identity.

57 Percent of those unemployed in Finland who are in construction.

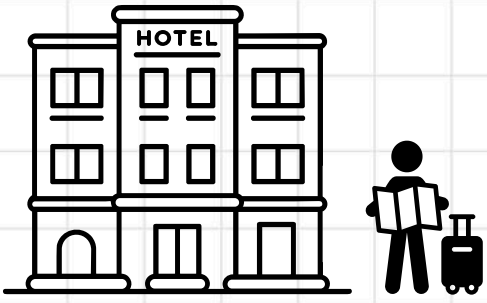
22 Percent of 18-24 year olds unemployed in Finland in June of 2025.

18-29 Age group reporting most stress in Finland.

60-74 Age group reporting least stress in Finland.

79 Percentage fill rate of Finnish hotels in June of 2025.

31 Percentage decrease in American tourists in Finland from June 2024 to June 2025.



FINNFO – FACTS ABOUT FINLAND

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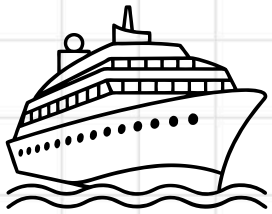

2026 Year in which population of Helsinki is expected to reach 600,000.

Aug 2025 Month during which K-Market in Helsinki's Ruoholahti did away with self-service check-out machines owing to dishonest customers.

300 Number of international cruise ships in Helsinki during 2019.

100 Expected number of cruise shops in Helsinki during 2025.

60-100 Estimated number of times during a year that police in Finland use a weapon for warning or directed firing.

1 in 3 years Average number of deaths caused by police firearms in Finland.

40 Percentage growth in Louis Vuitton sales in Finland for 2023 to 2024.

59M€ Amount in euros of Louis Vuitton retail sales in Finland in 2024.

74 Age in years of famed roller coaster at Linnanmäki in Helsinki.

7 Number of roller coasters in the world like the one in Linnanmäki still operated by a brakeman.

Source: All from Helsingin Sanomat — 1 and 2, 8/22/25, A 17; 3 and 4, 8/21/25, B 7; 5 and 6, 8/21/25, A 28; 7 and 8, 8/13/25, B 6; 9 and10, 8/10/25. A 30; 11, 7/31/25, A 21; 12, 7/31/25, 12, 7/31/25, A 22; 13 and 14, 7/31/25, A 22; 15 and 16, 7/16/25, A 19; 17 and 18, 7/14/25, A 25; 19 and 20, 7/19/25, A 21.

Finnish Holiday Market, November 15, 2025 | Leif Erikson Hall, Seattle

Join us to the annual Finnish Holiday Market, returning this year on Saturday, November 15, at Leif Erikson Hall (2245 NW 57th St, Ballard, Seattle). The market runs from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM, offering a festive day for the whole family.

- Handcrafted gifts from local makers: knitted items, art, ceramics and design
- Authentic Finnish baked goods and coffee
- Live seasonal music and performances
- Kid-friendly activities, including a special visit from Santa Claus!
- A warm, welcoming atmosphere for the community to connect and support each other
- Chance to purchase tickets and raffles to the Finnish Inpendence Day Dinner & Dance 2025!
- 100% volunteer-run, free entry; donations welcome (support helps fund local organizations!)
- Perfect for anyone who loves Finnish culture or Nordic traditions

Finnish Independence Day Dinner & Dance, December 6, 2025
The National Nordic Museum, Seattle

Join us to the annual Finnish Independence Day Dinner & Dance celebration at the National Nordic Museum (2655 NW Market St, Seattle), December 6, 6:00 PM.

Evening highlights include:

- A celebratory dinner paired with local wines
- Live music by Pirske, featuring vocalists Maria Männistö and Henrika Ojala
- Performance by the Finnish Choir
- “My Immigrant Story” by Miska Kajanus
- Keynote address by Mårten Mickos
- Raffle prizes from private sauna experiences to $500 Suomikauppa.fi gift cards!

Tickets are now available!

Last year’s celebration sold out quickly, so we encourage you to secure your place soon.
Tickets $100, raffle tickets $50. Purchase yours at:
https://www.finlandiafoundationseattle.com/independence-day-dinner/ or at the Finnish Holiday Market November 15, 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM at Leif Erickson Hall, Seattle.

FINLANDIA FOUNDATION SEATTLE CHAPTER
FINNISH LANGUAGE CLASSES WINTER 2026

MONDAYS/THURSDAYS ONLINE USING ZOOM

JANUARY 5/8 – MARCH 16/26, 2026 (10 SESSIONS)

Continuing Beginner Finnish – Monday evenings 5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. Pacific Time
This class is for advanced beginners who have already taken a Finnish class or two. We'll cover:
- The basics of Finnish grammatical objects
- Quantities in Finnish (countable and uncountable nouns)
- Food-related vocabulary, including buying and ordering in Finnish

The course includes 10 sessions, with one week off announced at the start of the semester.

Absolute Beginning Finnish – Thursday evenings 5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. Pacific Time. This class is for complete beginners and for those who have taken only one Finnish class. You'll learn:
- Pronunciation, verb conjugation, and numbers
- Greetings and simple dialogues
- Days of the week and basic conversational vocabulary

The course includes 10 sessions, with two weeks off announced at the start of the semester.

About our classes:
- Tuition for winter is $150 per course (= 10 sessions) and is due at the start of the semester.
- Courses are first-come, first-served. Please complete this registration form, scan it, and email it to languageclasses@finlandiafoundationseattle.com. OR mail it with your payment check made to Finlandia Foundation Seattle Chapter to: Finlandia Foundation Seattle Chapter, PO Box 5024, Bellevue, WA 98009
- Online payment can be done at: https://www.finlandiafoundationseattle.com/language-classes/

STUDENT INFORMATION

Full Name _____ _____ Phone Number _____

Email _____ Mailing Address _____

City _____ ZIP/Postal Code _____

CLASS LEVEL

☐ **Absolute Beginning Finnish** ☐ **Finnish Vocabulary**

ARE YOU A FFSC MEMBER YET? MEMBERSHIP IS BY THE CALENDAR YEAR.

☐ Single $25/yr ☐ Senior $20/yr

☐ Couple/Family $30/yr ☐ Senior Couple $25/yr

☐ Supporting $55/yr ☐ Lifetime $350

PAYMENT DETAILS

Payment amount: tuition $ _____ Membership $ _____ Total $ _____

Check # _____ Payment date _____ Class Level _____

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The Finlandia Foundation of Seattle Chapter membership is by the calendar year.

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Full Name

Phone Number

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Mailing Address

City

ZIP/Postal Code

PAYMENT DETAILS (CHECK & ONLINE)

Membership $ Donation $ Total $

Check # Payment date

Online payment: https://www.finlandiafoundationseattle.com/join/

VOLUNTEERING

☐ I want to contribute by volunteering at FFSC

Cut this out and mail it with your payment check made to Finlandia Foundation Seattle Chapter to: Finlandia Foundation Seattle Chapter, PO Box 5024, Bellevue, WA 98009.

Dues and donations are tax deductible. We are a 501(c)3 corporation.

BY MAIEN GAUP SANDBERG

IF I HAVE CHILDREN, WILL THEY SPEAK MY LANGUAGE?

“Oja, don humat sámegiela?” she asked, surprised that I knew how to speak Sámi. I had lived away from my village for most of my life, so she assumed I had forgotten the language. I was attending a wedding with my family, wearing the gákti, my colorful traditional clothes. The wedding was held at the gym, like most of the weddings in Guovdageaidnu, so that all the guests would fit. Even then, people came in turns, ate dinner, and moved on so others would have room to sit and eat.

Proud that I could speak it without fault, I answered “dieđusge”, of course, my mother made sure of it. Moving to a city where Norwegian is the main language made me realize that there are very few people who speak my language. I don’t know when the fear started forming, but today it has taken root. The thoughts about Sámi are constantly present.

A Language, a Feeling

As you can already sense, my language, the indigenous North Sámi language, means a lot to me. The same cannot be said for Norwegian, nor English. Don’t get me wrong, I’m deeply fascinated by all languages, and I’m very grateful to speak three fluently, and a fourth conversationally, Spanish, which I absolutely romanticize. But how I feel about the Sámi language reminds me of the feeling I get if someone criticizes someone dear to me: protective.

The Sámi people span Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, in an area called Sápmi. Sámi languages have existed there for thousands of years. Our languages, part of the Uralic family, share distant roots with Finnish, Estonian, and Hungarian, but nothing with Norwegian or Swedish. North Sámi, the most widely spoken, has 20,000–30,000 speakers, yet UNESCO still classifies it as endangered.

Despite the love for my mother tongue, or maybe because of it, I am worried. I have a strong need to save it, to speak it properly, and I feel the pressure to have children to whom I can teach it. Too bad that I live in the U.S., my boyfriend is Mexican, and there is no one around me speaking Norwegian, let alone Sámi. If I ever do have children, will they speak my language? Will they feel the weight of its history, of how it ties me to my home? Will they feel the need to continue saving it?

What We Lose When Language Is Lost

Language is deeply tied to identity, though its significance varies from person to person. Annika Pasanen, Professor of Sámi sociolinguistics at the Sámi University of Applied Sciences, explains: “For some Sámi, not speaking the language isn’t a loss. For others,

Maien, her mother, father and brother.

it's a tragedy." She adds, "For speakers of a majority language, language loss is not something they usually think about. But for most Sámi, it's a daily reality."

Now that I live in Seattle, without anyone to speak Sámi to, I can feel that my language is slipping bit by bit. I used to think in Sámi, and sometimes in Norwegian. Now my main language is English; I speak it daily and now I also think in English. When I get frustrated or stub my toe, Sámi reflexively comes up, which is comforting and also fortunate as no one around me understands. Still, if I try to explain something outside of the daily catch-up conversation with my mother, I find myself struggling. It's upsetting and scary, as it confirms that language is like a muscle you have to keep using actively so it doesn't weaken.

Homesickness

I grew up in a house with my mother, father, and older brother. I was surrounded by the homes of my grandma, uncles, aunts and cousins. I spoke Sámi every day in a small town of less than 1500 people, Guovdageaidnu, one of a couple that have North Sámi as their main language. Living so close to family, having almost the whole neighborhood to ourselves, was a dream. My cousins, both first and second, have been my best friends growing up and we're all still tightly knit.

In Sámi it is apparent that family, extended relatives, and community are important. We have different words for aunt and uncle, depending on the relationship, if they are older or younger than your parents, if they are married to your uncle or aunt etc. These are just a few examples of the many different words we have to describe family relationships.

Before, when the Sámi used to be nomadic, everyone was a part of raising the children. In some ways that is still true, especially in reindeer herding families. Everyone gets involved in how the child is raised; even until you are an adult, both aunts and older cousins will give advice and guidance, and often try to decide for you. My mother's side of the family used to herd reindeer, but when my grandpa passed away no one took over the operations. I didn't grow up learning about reindeer herding, other than from stories and books, and a lot of herding vocabulary has been lost to me and many others whose families quit herding.

When I started second grade, we moved away from my safe haven (if you can call a village in the middle of the arctic tundra that), away from family and community. We moved to Tromsø, "the big city," with around 50,000 people, and most of them don't speak a word of Sámi. To be fair,

Tromsø is the biggest city in the north of Norway, and also a whole day of travel from Guovdageaidnu, driving through Finland. The language wasn't really an issue, as I spoke Norwegian at home with my father, but the loss of having my big family around me could be felt by everyone. Suddenly we were just a small family in a small apartment in what felt like an enormous city.

From Sámi to Norwegian and Back Again

Because my father's side of the family doesn't speak Sámi, I grew up believing that they weren't Sámi. As a child I didn't know that most of the Sámi population in fact don't speak any of the Sámi languages due to assimilation, and was lucky not to know the painful reason behind it. I used to speak Sámi to my mother, believing that no one would understand. Little did I know that my grandma was listening, understanding. She just wasn't allowed to speak it when she was my age.

For centuries, Norwegianization policies sought to erase Sámi identity. Between the 16th to the 18th century, Sámi went from traditional animistic beliefs, with many gods, to believing in one Christian god through forced conversion. In Norway, this process intensified in the late 19th century with the rise of Norwegian nationalism. The Norwegianization policy sought to create a unified nation-state by forcibly integrating the Sámi population into Norwegian society. This involved banning the use of Sámi languages in schools, public administration, and daily life. Children were often removed from their families and placed in boarding schools where they were forbidden to speak their mother tongue, resulting in deep emotional and psychological scars that persist across generations.

Language loss doesn't just happen in a vacuum, it carries deep emotional consequences. Professor Pasanen has spent years studying Sámi language revitalization and describes the process as being filled with both grief and hope. "Many parents who chose not to pass on Sámi to their children now feel guilt because they see that it wasn't the best choice, at least not from today's perspective," she explains. "But at the time, they believed they were protecting their children, helping them assimilate to avoid discrimination."

For the generation that grew up without speaking Sámi, the emotions are complex. "Many feel guilty even though it's not logical," Pasanen says. "They think, If you are Sámi, you are expected to speak Sámi. And if you don't, there's something wrong with you and you're not a proper Sámi." Unfortunate, but often true. Even my friends who have grown up after the assimilation processes had officially ended, still feel the effects of it. They have expressed feelings of not being accepted, or that acceptance comes with the learning and the fluency of the language.

The Red House on The Hill

My father didn't grow up speaking the Sámi language because of Norwegianization, but his grandparents spoke it fluently, used it as a "secret language" for conversations that the children wouldn't understand, in a language the kids weren't taught. In his twenties my dad started learning the language, reclaiming it if

you will, and is still learning.

The tiny village where my father is from, Saraby, in the far north of Norway, didn't get phone service until a few years back. Before that we had to go around the first curve of the mountain to receive messages and maybe be able to call someone, depending on the weather, to paint a picture of how remote this place is.

My grandparents' house stands on a hill, tucked in a fjord surrounded by tall mountains, looking out over the ocean. The dirt road leading to the house seemed so long when I was younger. I always wanted my grandfather to come get me with the snowmobile when it was winter and our car wouldn't make it through the snow. Now, my heartrate still rises walking up the hill. Everything seems smaller, yet still as magical. It's still the most beautiful place on earth, and the smell of my grandma's cooking is ever present.

I used to spend every vacation and every summer in Saraby with my grandparents. In the winter, playing and skiing on untouched snow as far as the eye can see. In summer, running around in the greenest of fields, fishing, swimming in the freezing ocean, in lakes and rivers. My grandparents were my best friends, and they are still the dearest to my heart, my role models.

To me, my grandparents have always been old. Now, watching them actually growing old, realizing there are stories, so much information disappearing, that I don't know how to get access to, is a kind of heartache I only first knew when I lost my maternal grandmother, my áhkku.

Maien's maternal grandmother, paternal grandmother and godfather and Maien.

My father's parents live where they have always lived. They grew up in neighboring houses, through harsh, seemingly everlasting winters, and summers when the sun never set. But in the north of Norway, there is a quiet story: a story of violence and war, and it has left its mark on the people. My grandpa was ten years old, my grandma five when WWII ended. Her father had hid in the mountains, in a cave, with my grandmother's siblings, like so many other families. They didn't want to evacuate from their homes. My grandma was the youngest of seven, so she was sent away, as they believed she would not survive in the conditions of a cave life. It was probably for the best: the caves took many lives, as the sick had nowhere to go.

When the Germans retreated after they lost the war, they burned everything. In the north, there are very few houses and buildings that date back to before the war. What the Germans left behind wasn't just ashes, it was

and disruption. Nevertheless, people returned, rebuilt their homes, and life continued. Some things, like language, never fully returned. Already under pressure from Norwegianization, many Sámi parents stopped passing on the language, believing that assimilation was their only option for a good future.

Today many elderly struggle with the memories, but there's an unspoken rule of not talking about the hard times, instead you toughen up and keep going. It's the way of the people, to be able to live in such a harsh environment, the most extreme weather conditions. I see it in my own grandpa, as he's grown anxious in his old age. The doctor has seen it in others too, I guess your childhood, however long ago it seems, still has deep roots.

It is hard to ask them about their lives. I have to find the right moment, and the moments seem so few now. I'm almost never home, and when I am, I only visit them for a few days.

Language Is Ever-Changing

Even though the era of forced assimilation has ended, Sámi languages still face challenges, some of which are now beyond our control. Climate change, in particular, is not only altering the landscapes where Sámi communities have lived for thousands of years but is also affecting how our languages evolve. For the Sámi, language has always been deeply tied to nature, especially in traditional activities like reindeer herding and fishing; our language is an archive of environmental knowledge. But what happens when the environment changes?

Pentti Pieski, a Sámi reindeer herder, spoke to the BBC in 2024 about the loss of traditional terminology as climate shifts disrupt old patterns. Words once used to describe specific types of ice, the migration of reindeer, or the conditions for fishing are fading from daily use. When certain traditions stop, so do the conversations around them. He pointed out how something as simple as fishing on the river once involved an entire cycle of preparation, storytelling, and communal practice, all spoken in North Sámi. As salmon stocks decline and fishing bans increase, these rituals disappear, and with them, pieces of our language.

It's a quiet kind of erosion, not unlike what happened under Norwegianization, but this time, government policies are not the only things restricting the use of Sámi. The land itself is changing, forcing us to adapt.

Indigenous Friends, My Indigenous Family

As we now know, Indigenous languages are vital to cultural identity, knowledge, and self-determination, yet they face a severe threat of extinction, according to the United Nations. Of the world's approximately 6,700 languages, 40% are endangered, and the majority of these are indigenous. It is estimated that one indigenous language dies every two weeks. Despite representing less than 6% of the global population, Indigenous people speak over half of the world's languages. To me, that is quite incredible.

Author K. David Harrison writes in his book, When Languages Die, that "An immense edifice of human knowledge, painstakingly assembled

over millennia by countless minds, , is eroding, vanishing into oblivion." Behind the numbers are stories like that of my grandparents, shaped by dispossession, repression, and assimilation, and stories like mine, shaped by globalization and migration. When a language is no longer spoken, a culture and a way of life often disappear with it.

Over the years, I've met many brilliant people working to reclaim their language, culture, and protect Indigenous rights, often against overwhelming odds. At international forums like the UN Climate Change Conference (COP) and the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), I've been lucky to form friendships with other Indigenous youth who share the same hope and pressure: to keep our languages and cultures alive. We've bonded over this sense of responsibility and the complexities of navigating relationships, careers, and migration.

Land, Memory, and Resistance

Indigenous languages are mundane conversations, expressions of love and affection, and sometimes they are hurtful words and arguments. But, they also map our world, hold the knowledge of generations, and root us to our native landscapes.

Many Indigenous languages are deeply land-based. They were shaped by geography, weather, movement, and survival. Words often carry within them not just meaning but memory. In Sámi, there are more than 300 words for snow, each describing a particular texture, a danger, or a change in the landscape. There are words for the way reindeer move, the way a season shifts, or the smell of the earth before a storm. These words carry knowledge passed down for thousands of years. When the way of life that created them begins to fade, the language fades with it.

Some words have already been lost. In Northern Norway, many Sámi place names were replaced with clumsy Norwegian translations that stripped them of meaning. Jiepmaluokta, the Bay of Seals, became Hjemmeluftbukta, Home Air Bay. A name that makes no sense, because it no longer describes what is there. The loss of place names like these shows how colonization reshapes not just the map, but also how people relate to their environment.

Watching Drowned Land, a documentary about the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, reminded me how deeply this connection to land runs. The film follows the community's resistance to damming and development of the Kiamichi River. One of the central voices, Charlotte Robbins Leonard, reflects on how her ancestors were forced to leave their ancestral land in Mississippi during the removal of the 1830s. After being pushed west along the Trail of Tears, they arrived in unfamiliar territory. The practices, stories, and understanding that had developed over generations were rooted in a specific place, and when they left, much of that knowledge wasn't relevant to the new area.

The film offers a powerful reminder of how disconnection from land can disrupt the transmission of cultural knowledge and practices. The history of the Choctaw Nation includes the trauma of forced removal, as well as

continued efforts to sustain community, protect natural resources, and engage younger generations in remembering what was lost.

"**Having Kids Is Our Resistance**"

In writing this essay, I think of my friend, a brilliant Kichwa woman, Maria Jose, or Majo, telling me about the moment she changed her mind about having kids. She never wanted kids, but an indigenous female professor of hers said something that really stuck with Majo: “Having kids is our resistance.”

Majo, like many of my indigenous friends, feels pressure to find a partner who preferably speaks her language, alternatively someone willing to live in her community, and be comfortable surrounded by a language they don’t speak, but hopefully will learn. I too feel this pressure, and still feel urgency to do everything in my power to keep my language alive. In our era of globalization and mass migration, people find partners from outside of their communities and even outside their countries, and these partners do not necessarily share a language. But even if the other person is willing to learn the language, there are still so many layers to understanding.

As Professor of sociology at the University of Washington and author Pepper Schwartz told me, "Language has both direct and subtle meanings. Culturally, even expressions can mean different things. So it's a huge thing to be able to not only understand someone else's language, but the subtleties inherent in it. It can make communication satisfying or dissatisfying, depending on how well people understand each other. Even intent might be masked and misunderstood because of language differences.”

This is especially true for indigenous languages, where the nuances of meaning are often deeply intertwined with cultural traditions and a specific worldview. When those nuances are lost, so too is a vital part of a community's identity. This makes the work of preserving Indigenous languages even more critical. By keeping the language alive and the words flowing, you are also maintaining access to a unique way of understanding the world and a connection to a cultural heritage that can never be fully translated.

Revival and Survival

Evidence shows that efforts to revitalize languages can have great impact. Even a language that had already "died" has been revived. In Leanne Hinton's book Bringing Our Languages Home, a Miami family shares their journey of reclaiming their lost language.

Daryl Baldwin, a member of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, grew up without his ancestral language, Myaamia. The last known speaker died the year he was born. But when Baldwin found a list of Myaamian words in his grandfather’s papers, he realized that, despite the language being classified as "extinct," its documentation could allow for revival. He set out on a mission, not just to learn the language but to reintroduce it to his family and community. Today, Myaamia is once again spoken in homes, schools, and even at Miami University, where a new generation is learning the language that had been lost for decades.

Protections and Threats

Comparing Myaamia, a language that was dormant, with North Sámi, a language that has always been alive and continuously spoken within its community, may not be appropriate. Nor is it culturally accurate to compare the Sámi experience directly with other Indigenous communities. Even though the language is alive, it is still vulnerable. The fear that it could disappear is real, and the path there is not as long as we might wish.

Thankfully, Sámi has strong protections. The right to Sámi education exists at all levels, especially for native speakers, and includes higher education. We also have the Sámi University of Applied Sciences, where students can pursue degrees in areas like teaching, nursing, and media, all in the North Sámi language. The Sámi Parliament plays an important role in protecting these rights and supporting Sámi cultural practices.

In addition to this, more and more apps are created in Sámi, we have Sámi news outlets like NRK Sápmi, and Sámi representation in popular culture, like in Frozen II and other Disney or Netflix productions, that help strengthen the language and show its value. Sámi is becoming "in," something people want to learn. But even this visibility brings its own risks.

When Sámi people who don't speak the language are empowered through inclusive identity definitions, which is positive and important in many ways, it can also unintentionally shift the language dynamics in Sámi spaces. Because the Sámi community is small and inclusive by nature, people often switch to Norwegian so that everyone can participate. Over time, this means Sámi may no longer be the natural language in Sámi gatherings. Some politicians have even gone so far as to call Norwegian "the new Sámi language," arguing that most Sámi in Norway only speak Norwegian today. That's deeply worrying.

The criteria for being included in the Sámi Parliament's electoral roll are broad. It is not an ethnic register, and you don't need to speak the language or be part of the culture today. You only need to declare that you perceive yourself as Sámi and have a parent, grandparent, or even great-grandparent who had Sámi as a home language. As a result, many people have the right to vote on Sámi issues, even if they don't speak the language or actively engage with Sámi culture. Some use this right not to protect Sámi language and traditions, but to influence decisions about land and resources. When people who don't value the language shape Sámi policies, it threatens those of us who do.

So the threat to Sámi doesn't only come from outside pressure, but also from within. It's a paradox: more and more people are retaking their Sámi identity today, there's more attention and interest in Sámi culture, and yet, the language can still lose ground.

A Hope For The Future

Reading about Myaamia still gives me hope. If a language with no native speakers can come back, then there is certainly a future for Sámi. North Sámi has always been in use, and still has over 20,000 speakers after all. But what about my own family? If I don't raise my children in a Sámi-speaking community and if I don't actively fight for it, will my language fade in my own home?

"Sámi languages have become quite a unique example at global scale of language revitalization," Professor Pasanen tells me. "Sámi languages will flourish, and many of the smaller Sámi languages are radically reviving now," she assures me, "but bringing a language back into homes takes effort."

I know that North Sámi will be my children's first language because I won't accept anything else. Not because it is easy, but because it is necessary. Because the words I grew up with, the ones my father had to reclaim, the ones my great grandparents whispered in secret, deserve to be spoken freely. Without language, you lose access to a community and potentially a feeling of belonging.

One day, I hope to bring my own children to a wedding. And more than anything, I hope that if someone asks them "Oja, don humat sámegiela?", they will answer as I once did, without hesitation.

DISCOVER LOCAL EVENTS

Date & Time	Event	Location	Details
Fri, Nov 7, 2025 5:30–9:00 PM	Nordic Mixer	Leif Erikson Hall, Seattle	A festive social gathering hosted by the Norwegians, featuring live music by the Winter Band, food and drinks for purchase. Free entry.
Sun, Nov 9, 2025 12:00–1:00 PM	Yoga of Stillness (After Service)	Finnish Lutheran Church, Seattle	Guided by Marita Toivonen in Finnish. Free and open to all. Please bring your own yoga mat.

Date & Time	Event	Location	Details
Sat, Nov 15, 2025 10:00 AM–3:00 PM	Finnish Holiday Market	Leif Erikson Hall, Seattle	Family-friendly event with handmade gifts, baked goods, live music, and Santa visit. Free entry. Raffle and ticket sales for Finnish Independence Day Dinner & Dance.
Sat, Dec 6, 2025 6:00 PM	Finnish Independence Day Dinner & Dance	National Nordic Museum, Seattle	Celebration with dinner, live music by Pirske, performances by Finnish Choir, speakers, and raffles. Tickets $100; raffle tickets $50. finlandiafoundationseattle.com/independence-day-dinner
Sun, Dec 14, 2025 10:00 AM	Service & Beautiful Christmas Carols / Kauneimmat joululaulut	Finnish Lutheran Church, Seattle	Service followed by a half-hour sing-alongs around 11:00 AM and coffee. With Maria Männistö and Kristy Daniels.
Sun, Dec 21, 2025 1:00 PM	Beautiful Christmas Carols / Kauneimmat joululaulut	Andrew's Lutheran Church, Bellevue	With Maria Männistö, Akseli Leppänen, Jani Kuivalainen, and Marita Toivonen. Coffee served after the program.
Thurs, Dec 25, 10:00 AM	Christmas Service	Finnish Lutheran Church, Seattle	With the church choir, Maria Männistö, and Marita Toivonen. Festive coffee served afterwards.

LOCAL ART NOTES

Contributor: Gary London

Regrettably, some events that should have been reported in previous issues of this newsletter had escaped our attention and are now history. Still, they bear mentioning, since they were part of the Finnish arts scene in September.

On September 20 and 21, Finland was first to be represented in the annual Nordic Chamber Music Series. The program featured the music of Finnish composer **Erkki Melartin**. Performers included the Nexus Quartet, with soprano soloist Laura Loge, who also serves as Artistic Director for the series. Music from Denmark is scheduled on January 10 and 11, followed by Iceland on February 7 and 8, Sweden on March 7 and 8, Lithuania on April 18 and 19, and Norway on May 2 and 3. Concerts are held in Seattle at the Ballard First Lutheran Church and in Tacoma at the First Lutheran Church. While the performances are free, donations are welcome. Chief sponsor is the Northwest Edvard Grieg Society.

Also on September 20 was a performance by Finnish musicians Marianne Maans, fiddle player, and **Pekka Pentikäinen**, accordionist. The Phinney Center was the venue for this concert, which attracted an audience of folk music fans.

Local melodic death metal band **Veriteras** joined other bands for a night at El Corazòn on September 18. Veriteras had been touring in the West Coast in support of its sophomore album, Dark Horizon. Information about future performances was not available at press time.

Local fans of Finnish metal bands will be disappointed to learn that Seattle is not part of US tours by **Apocalyptica** nor Amorphis in 2025-26. However, the former will be performing in Vancouver, BC on October 10 and in Spokane on October 11. Amorphis, on the other hand, has only one US concert scheduled, and that is in Miami on January 29, 2026. Even more distressing is the now two year hiatus from touring by Nightwish. This is an indefinite suspension, though the band members claim they will return to the road at some point.

As noted in the last edition of this newsletter, Finnish classical music is poorly represented in the current concert season. The sole exception appears to be the Rainer Symphony, which

has a performance of the **Sibelius Symphony No. 2** on November 16 at 3:00 p.m. The program also includes Borodin's "In the Steppes of Central Asia," and Ralph Vaughn Williams's "The Lark Ascending." Tickets for this or other Rainier Symphony concerts are available through tickets@rainiersymphony.com or by calling 206.781.5618. The orchestra venue is the Foster Performing Arts Center in Tukwila.

It is worth noting that the concertmaster for the Rainier Symphony is **Ilkka Talvi,** who previously held this position with the Seattle Symphony and Seattle Opera. Talvi emigrated from his native Finland, where he had been on the faculty at the Sibelius Academy, to the US, where he became a principal of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra before his move to Seattle in the 1980s. In addition to his current concertmaster duties, he currently serves on the faculty of Seattle Pacific University and gives private lessons.

While it is a stretch to refer to it as "local," **Kaija Saariaho's** lauded opera, Innocence will be available to listeners in Seattle on April 18 on KING-FM at 10:00 a.m. Unfortunately, the production will not be part of the Metropolitan Opera's "Live in HD" series in movie theaters. With this early notice, readers can plan a trip to New York City during the month of April for a live performance of Innocence on one of a half dozen evenings. Susanna Mälkki, who conducted the debut production in Aix-en-Provence in 2021, will also be at the helm at the Met. With Innocence, Saariaho will be the only woman to have had two operas performed at this famed house. Her first, L'amour de loin, was part of the company's 2016-2017 season.

Innocence comes to the Metropolitan Opera after its debut and in performances at the Finnish National Opera, London's Royal Opera House, the Dutch National Opera and the Adelaide Festival. Its 2024 North American premiere at the San Francisco Opera featured many of the same singers who are in the Met cast, including **Miles Mykkanen**, who will be performing in Seattle Opera's concert version of Richard Strauss's Daphne on January 16 and 18. Vilma Jää, who has owned the role of Markéta since the debut of Innocence, continues at the Met.

Innocence is about the effects on survivors of a shooting at an international school in Finland. They sing in their native languages, requiring that **Sofi Oksanen's** original Finnish libretto be translated/adapted — work done by Aleksi Barrière. Saariaho herself has said that the opera is about recovery and healing in the aftermath of a tragedy. The opera has been praised for its topicality, but much beyond that. Writing for the New York Times after its 2021 debut, Zachary Woolfe wrote, "Grand and restrained, a thriller that is also a meditation, Innocence is the most powerful work Saariaho has written."

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