

Mount Holyoke College Class of 1964 **MINI-REUNION IN FINLAND**

July 6-18, 2017

Our wonderful Finland mini-reunion was organized by our Finnish classmate, Laura Finne-Elonen, with Mary Lee Warren providing stateside assistance. Nancy Goff arranged for operas, musical events and hotel in Savonlinna.

Laura Finne was with us as an exchange student at MHC in 1963-64. She is a physician, an elected official, worker for women's rights, and a lover of music, art and architecture. Laura organized a two-week fabulous exploration of things Finnish, and those of us who participated came away with a great love and appreciation for Finland and the Finnish people.



Most of us gathered in Helsinki on July 6, and the following day took the train to Savonlinna, in southeastern Finland, where we attended the world-class opera festival held in the medieval Olavinlinna Castle. On July 11 we took the train back to Helsinki, our base for an exploration of the city and its surroundings. It's their centennial year – in 1917 Finland achieved its independence from Russia.

We investigated Finnish architecture and design, and visited the homes/studios of the grand masters Alvar Aalto, and of Eliel and Eero Saarinen. We were briefed on the Health and on the Political systems. Below : two vignettes from a synopsis of the trip.

Savonlinna; Olavinlinna Castle [written by Ellen Nutter] was built in the 15th century. Three of our four concerts were performed in the courtyard: **Rigoletto**, the world premiere of Aulis Sallinen's **Castle in the Water**; and **Kullervo** (also by Sallinen) based on the Kaleva, the Finnish national epic. The Male Voice Choir concert was held at Kerimäki Church, the largest wooden church in the world, built in 1848.



Sibelius Monument (written by Sue Gaumer) ... heard three young women singing the tune at his remarkable memorial. *Finlandia* is a majestic piece of music not usually performed by three small voices, but I was glad they were there singing away. Then I saw the pipes! I recall Laura telling us that the design, done by a woman, was at first refused, but then reconsidered and constructed. I loved it and loved watching members of our group scurry all over the mound upon which it sits and then try putting their heads in the pipes.



We had 27 participants. In addition to Laura, her husband Erkki and special guest grandson Axel, these included:

Lily Klebanoff Blake

Barbara Field Collins and Don

Meredith Dobyns

Pat Slodden Fleischauer

Susan Salot Gaumer

Nancy Chambers Goff and Bob

Gail Simons Humphreys and Steve

Priscilla Morse Huston

Wendy Lycan Jackson

Susan Koch

Edie Prentice Mendez

Jane Crombie Michel and Jacques

Sarah Allen Mowitt

Barbara Scott Nelson

Ellen Manfredonia Nutter and Dave

Mary Lee Warren

Anita Corman Weinblatt and Herb

Lenore Wadzinski Yousef

[CLICK HERE](#)- for a daily Synopsis and more photos. [Login Required.](#)

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Laura Finne was with us as an exchange student at MHC in 1963-64. She is a physician, an elected official, worker for women's rights, and a lover of music, art and architecture. Laura and her family attended our mini-reunion in DC a few years ago, and she wanted to show us some of her favorite places in Finland. This became a two-week fabulous exploration of things Finnish, and those of us who participated came away with a great love and appreciation for Finland and the Finnish people.

We had 27 participants. In addition to Laura, her husband Erkki and special guest grandson Axel (age 14), these included:

Lily Klebanoff Blake	Susan Koch
Barbara Field Collins and Don	Edie Prentice Mendez
Meredith Dobyns	Jane Crombie Michel and Jacques
Pat Slodden Fleischauer	Sarah Allen Mowitt
Susan Salot Gaumer	Barbara Scott Nelson
Nancy Chambers Goff and Bob	Ellen Manfredonia Nutter and Dave
Gail Simons Humphreys and Steve	Mary Lee Warren
Priscilla Morse Huston	Anita Corman Weinblatt and Herb
Wendy Lycan Jackson	Lenore Wadzinski Yousef

Most of us gathered in Helsinki on July 6, and the following day took the train to Savonlinna, in southeastern Finland, where we attended the world-class opera festival held in the medieval Olavinlinna Castle. On July 11 we took the train back to Helsinki, our base for an exploration of the city and its surroundings. Following is a daily synopsis of the trip.

July 6 – Arrival in Helsinki

Helsinki is a modern city, built largely in the 19-21st centuries. Modern Finnish architecture and design, including such greats as Alvar Aalto and Eliel and Eero Saarinen, flourished around the turn of the 20th c., and especially after 1917, when Finland achieved its independence from Russia. Helsinki's older areas, reminiscent of Stockholm and St. Petersburg, reflect Finland's history as part of Sweden in the 18th c. and Russia in the 19th c.

Our Helsinki hotel, the Original Sokos Hotel Vaakuna, is located opposite Eliel Saarinen's central train station in downtown Helsinki. The Vaakuna was designed in the Finnish functional style for the Olympics in 1952. In its lobby is a fountain and sculpture designed by Laura's grandfather, sculptor Gunnar Finne.



Façade of Train Station, view of hotel

Hotel Roof-top Terrace

July 7 – Train to Savonlinna; Guided Tour of Olavanlinna Castle

Olavinlinna Castle in Savonlinna was built in the 15th c. to protect this part of what was then Sweden from the Russians. The castle is well-preserved, and the festival's opera performances are held under a tent in its fortified courtyard.

Dinner that night was the local specialty, fried vendace, a species of tiny freshwater whitefish, enjoyed on the roof terrace of the Hotel Seurahuone, with views of the lake and the city.

July 8 – Opera Festival

In celebration of 2017 as the 100th anniversary of Finnish independence, we attended the world premiere of Aulis Sallinen's *Castle in the Water*, chronicling the history of **Olavanlinna Castle**; and *Kullervo*, also by Sallinen, based on the Kaleva, the Finnish national epic.

Between the two performances, we had a superb meal of Finnish delicacies at the Family Hotel Hospitz.



July 9 – Lake Cruise and Festival Choir

The cruise on Lake Saimaa from Savonlinna Harbor was a glimpse of the watery environment of this part of Finland, where it seems there is more water than land. We passed tiny forested islands and remote cabins, each with its own sauna, where Finns get away from it all.

The Male Voice Choir and Tapiola Children's Choir concert that evening was held at Kerimäki Church, the largest wooden church in the world, built in 1848 with seats for 3300 people. In the Finnish and Baltic tradition, the concert was a cappella. The encore, with both choirs distributed throughout the sanctuary, was a very moving rendition of Sibelius's "Finlandia" that had the audience hushed and in tears.



Interior of largest wooden church



harbor cruise

July 10 – Punkaharju and Rigoletto

At Punkaharju is “the most beautiful view in Finland,” with lakes on both sides of narrow forested ridge. Nearby was a trench preserved from the harrowing Winter War of 1939-40, when the Finns succeeded in preventing the Russians from taking over their country.

Another fabulous buffet was enjoyed at the Hotel Punkaharju, where later in the summer Finnish president Niinisto entertained Vladimir Putin before his visit to Savonlinna.

After visits to the Forest Museum Losto and the studio of artist Taidekartano Johanna Oras, the day ended with a fabulous Rigoletto at Olavinlinna.

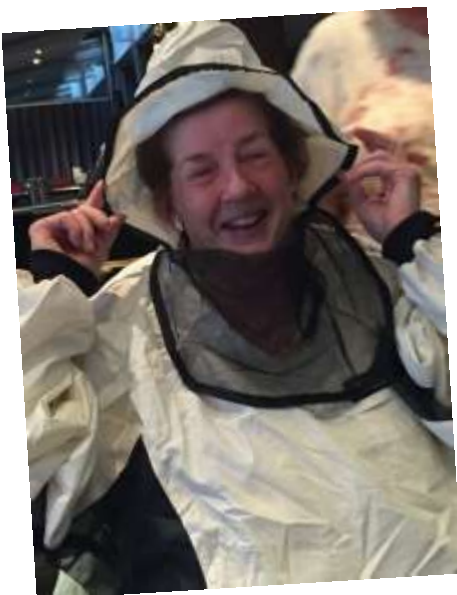
July 11 Train to Helsinki, Atheneum and Dinner to Honor Laura

At the Finnish National Gallery, the Atheneum, we enjoyed masterpieces of Finnish art and a special exhibit on designer and architect Alvar Aalto. {chairs & stools. Vase}



At dinner we presented Laura with thank you gifts. Many were books representing our home towns. Wendy brought a full insect protection jacket, in case we encountered the famous Finnish mosquitos during our forays in the countryside.

Laura



Ushers at concert wore own 'national dress'



July 12 – Helsinki Tour, Finnish Institute of Foreign Affairs, Dinner Cruise

A guided bus tour provided an overview of Helsinki sights, with stops at the Sibelius Monument and the beautiful underground Temppeliaukko Church.

Rock Church



Fountain, where harbor meets Esplanade



At the Finnish Institute of Foreign Affairs, Program Director Juha Jokela, explained Finnish foreign policy and the complexities of Finland's situation at the far eastern reaches of the EU, with a significant border with Russia.

Afternoon free time allowed strolling the Esplanade and the historic center of Helsinki, as well as visits to the Finnish Design Museum, the 1748 Suomenlinna Sea Fortress, the renovated National Library and the **new University Library**. (2 photos below)

Our dinner cruise in Helsinki's beautiful archipelago provided superb views of the city as well of the huge Finnish ice breakers and cruise ships of many nations.



July 13 – Sipoo and Porvoo

Sipoo is a town outside of Helsinki where Laura and her family lived for many years. We were treated to a guided tour of its beautiful 14th c. stone church, and then visited the Sipoo **Municipal Health Center**, where Laura had worked before her retirement. Her colleagues described the Finnish national health

system, renowned throughout the world. The Municipal Center not only provides health services, but places much emphasis on prevention and social services. Their professionalism, kindness and cheery attitude had us all wanting to move to Sipoo.



Porvoo is a charming riverside town first developed in the 13th century. It is considered the birthplace of Finland, because in 1809, at the Diet of Porvoo, the Russian Tsar Alexander I agreed to allow the Finns to be governed under their own laws.

On the way back to Helsinki, we stopped at the home of artist Kerstin Enbom, who guided us through her magical landscape of historic houses and buildings.



July 14 – OP Bank and Free Time

OP Bank is a spectacular example of the continuing excellence of Finnish architecture and design. Its soaring interior spaces and the human scale of its design elements were inspiring. The bank is also on the cutting edge of information technology – it is a bank without tellers or cash, where all business is conducted digitally.



July 15 – Saarinen and Aalto

We journeyed to Hvittrask, the turn-of-the-20th century homes and studio of Finnish architects Eliel Saarinen, Herman Gesellius, and Armas Lindren. Each architect designed his own house in the National Romantic Style, harking back to traditional, and even medieval, design and hand craftsmanship. Eliel Saarinen and his son, Eero, went on to design many modern buildings in the United States, including the Chicago Tribune Tower (Eliel) and the TWA Terminal at JFK Airport in NYC (Eero).

[Aalto University](#)



We also visited the home/studio of Alvar Aalto in Munkkiniemi.

July 16 – Lake Tuusula: Lotta Museum and Homes of Pekka Halonen and Jean Sibelius

Pekka Halonen is a beloved artist of the ‘Golden Era’ of Finnish art, at the turn of the 20th c. His paintings depict ordinary Finnish people and Finnish landscapes, especially the forested area around Lake Tuusula.

The Lotta Museum tells the story of the Lotta Svard organization, a group of women volunteers who helped Finnish soldiers in many capacities, especially during WWII. A signature project was arranging that the bodies of all Finnish soldiers who died in battle were returned to their families for burial.

[Ainola](#) was the home of renowned Finnish composer Jean Sibelius and his family from 1904. Thirty minutes from Helsinki, the house afforded the seclusion Sibelius needed for his creative endeavors, while other artistic families in the neighborhood provided a lively social circle.



Dinner was at the elegant glass-walled **Café Kappeli** on the Esplanade in Helsinki, where we celebrated Lily's birthday.

Sibilius green fireplace



Glass café



July 17 – Free Time and Farewell Dinner

People spent the day further exploring Helsinki or taking the ferry to Tallinn, Estonia, or to Porvoo. Dinner that evening was at the fascinating Atelier Finne, a restaurant in Laura's grandfather Gunnar Finne's former sculpture studio, where many of his works are on display.

This was a fabulous trip! Thank you, Laura!!! Ellen Nutter, Editor

Some Portraits – Sarah,

Gail

Meredith



Jane & Jacques, from Chartres

Priscilla and Nancy G.



Pat F and Sue G



Steve Humphrys



Lily



Barb Collins and Don, from Oxbridge



Wendy



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for 2-page Recap with different pictures