ED ON 94TH BIRTHDAY

“Raivaaja” March 26, 1987

Today I reached a special stop on my life’s journey, the 94th on this curvy road that has been filled with pot holes. I inquired about the next leg of the road but I did not get a real answer as to whether

I will finish it.

It was a cold, bright March 18, 1893 when I was born in the lakeside sauna of our farm, under its sooty, protective planks, and with the special assistance of Minna Koskinen. Minna was the midwife of our village.

When I was washed and tightly wrapped in swaddling clothes, Minna brought me into the large living space of our farmhouse, put me into a cradle and told my sister to rock it if I started screaming. Then Minna returned to the sauna.

Deep snow drifts still covered the hill above the sauna, the fields and the ice on Piimäsjärvi. The spring sunshine produced a bright ray of light on the floor of the room. My sister placed her stool and the cradle in that light.

That was the beginning of my life’s journey and I have not had anything to regret. It was not always blossoms and roses. It was self-directed. In the beginning my parents pointed out the directions and there were explicit. I thank my parents for that.

I was 13 years old when my father died. After that I had to heed my mother’s advice. Or to listen to my oldest brother. It worked well. We were on good terms.

My education came from the “circulating school”, the catechism classes and the school of life, starting at the age of 16. In the last mentioned, the lessons were often hard but the teachings were very much needed for the long journey.

At the confirmation school ceremony I received a New Testament inscribed by Pastor Emil Bergroth because I had been successful in the Bible classes. This reward really belonged to my father. On Sunday mornings I had to read a sermon on the text of the day from the “Postillon”, then a chapter from “The

Christian’s Path” or something from the Bible that my father had selected.

Only then was I free to go on my own way which regularly led to the shore of Piimäsjärvi to fish for roach (Rutilus rutilus). My companions were the lovely nature and the cat who waited for the catch.

When I reached a man’s age, twenty one, my brother Jussi in America sent me a ticket and so I sailed off for a new country which was strange and unknown. At first I was homesick for my Finnish home and for my mother, my sister and two brothers, for my childhood boy mates and my pleasant girlfriends.

I joined the Finnish Socialist Chapter and its sports group called “Tarmo”. I made new friends and I continued my favorite interest in gymnastics and sports. Then other activities were added and soon it was enough to rid me of homesickness.

I wedded a girl from Pori (she had been a companion on the trip from Finland). The most destructive disease of that time (tuberculosis) took her after less than five years of marriage. We had one son.

I was a widower for about five years and I married a girl from Rauma. That marriage lasted 55 years.

She was taken from me by cancer, the monstrous killer of mankind.

I lived alone for several years but decided it should not last and so I invited my daughter’s daughter and her family to live with me and they agreed. That was my good fortune for I can again listen to a three year old tell me of all her day’s adventures and I can watch her activities.

I have left worry for others as we senior citizens have been urged to do. My step is shorter and closer to the pavement. A cane accompanies me like a life safer.

On sunny days there is singing, on cloudy days just humming. Thank you to all my relatives and friends for their good card. Until we meet again,

Ed Helander