ED ON MIDSUMMER’S EVE

“Raivaaja” July 13, 1988

{He writes about nature in his yard and then continues}

There was a pail under the tree, filled with water and sand, left there by my granddaughter yesterday. It caused the veil between the past and the present to be parted. Memories of Juhannus (St. John’s Day at Midsummer) and the activities involved in the celebration to flood my mind.

Mother sent me to fetch some sand from a brook in the forest, which was used to scrub the floor in the main room of the farmhouse. It had to be clean. This scouring was done annually to prepare for Juhannus.

Mother and her assistant, Karoliina Helin donned the thick cloth boots which were required for the process. The scrubbing was not with arm power but rather with foot action. The tempo resembled modern skiing.

We youngsters were used to pour the water on the floor. I really wanted to splash it up a bit higher so that Karoliina Helin could have a bath, but I did not dare to do it.

There was a small trap door in the corner of the room through which the water and sand found their way out. At the end only water was used for the rinse. Then no one was allowed inside until the floor was dry. Then clean mats were laid about the room and birch branches were placed outdoors on the sides of the door. Twigs of fir were laid below the stairs so that the field workers could clean their shoes.

We children felt that this annual floor scrubbing of the main room of the farm house was a worthy, important event. I can still smell the aroma from the clean floor combined with the odor of the flowers of the bird cherry bush outside. We were ready for Juhannus only when the floor was scrubbed and a leafy bower was put up in the yard. We sat in it listening to the call of the cuckoo and the song of the thrush. Ah, why couldn’t it always be Juhannus?

Ed Helander