

## Ilta-Sanomat 1/25/18

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Context: *In September 2017, the Finnish journalist, Johannes Kotkavirta, interviewed Mavis Mantila after she spoke at the Convocation Ceremony for FinnFestUSA 2017. Among other selected members of the Finnish diaspora, Ms. Mantila welcomed President Sauli Niinistö to Minnesota on behalf of Ojibwa Finnish Americans. She also made a connection between the journalist and her friend, Dr. Arne Vainio, who was also interviewed and described in this article. Karen Ba who translated this article is a friend of Mavis Mantila and of Finnish parentage.*

Title: **Arne Vainio is half Finnish and half Ojibwa – the tragic death of a family member on the reservation changed his life’s direction.**

Picture p. 1 Caption: Arne Vainio strived hard to get past his beginnings. His father committed suicide when Arne was a child, and his youth did not go well. As an adult he sought education through twists and turns, first as a firefighter, then as an EMT and finally as a doctor. (Picture: Johannes Kotkavirta, Arne Vainio’s photo album)

Summary Paragraph: **Love of the forest, mystical bond of nature and different mindset unite Finns and indigenous people in the Great Lakes region of the United States. From this a family is born.**

Article: One hundred thousand Finns moved to the United states between the mid-1800s and early 1900s in search of a better life. On the new continent, the forest-accustomed Finns often settled in the same regions with local indigenous people.

Furthermore, among the Finns and Indians also were born partnerships of romance, marriage and many children.

As a result, quite often a new people were born: Finndians. They lived particularly in the regions of northern Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin – at the edge of the Great Lakes and on both sides of the Canadian border. Most of the Finnish contact was with the region’s largest tribe, the Ojibwa.

One of these descendants of Finns and Ojibwa Indians from Hancock, Michigan, is Mavis Mantila, who works as a teacher. Mantila’s father’s parents moved to Michigan from Finland.

“I know that my grandmother was from northern Ostrobothnia, in the region of Oulu. I know little about my grandfather, I haven’t found a lot of information about him,” Mantila recounts.

Picture p. 2 Caption: Teacher Mavis Mantila's grandmother was from northern Ostrobothnia, in the Oulu region. (Picture: Johannes Kotkavirta)

**Born in the United States,** her father's life was not easy as her grandparents died when he was still a child.

"My father already went to work in the copper mine when he was 12-13 years old, where many Finns worked. Later, with the money he earned, he bought a small plot of land near my grandparents' home."

According to Mantila, during his life her father worked in lumber, dairy and drove a hauling truck. To his children, he spoke Finnish more often than English. The family's living conditions were not very good: no running water and to wash up they visited a cousin's sauna.

Mantila's mother, again, was a local Ojibwe. As for her father and mother meeting, she can only attribute it to the fact that Finns and Indians were living in the same region.

"Finnishtown was located only 5-6 miles from the reservation."

Her mother was about 16 years old when she got married to her father in 1944, who was 35 years old at that time. Finn and Indian marriages were very common at that time. Many Finnish immigrants came when they were single young men.

"On my reservation, every other mailbox had a Finnish name, and nobody thought anything of it. My mother and all four of my aunts got married to Finns," Mavis recounts.

Picture P. 3 Caption: Arne Vainio (on the left) in youth with his brothers and sisters. One of the family sisters is missing from the photo. (Picture: Arne Vainio's personal album.)

It is often said that Finns and Indians both have a close connection to nature and ability to live off the forest. Mantila finds Finns and Ojibwe also share in common their social structure.

"Finns were socialist and had their own ways for example the cooperatives. It was close to Indian egalitarian society, in which one must care for each other. They also shared being introverted and reserved. "

**Like the indigenous population,** the Finns also experienced discrimination in many places in the US. People still remember signs: "No Indians or Finns."

Mantila has never herself felt that Finns have been particularly ostracized. This must be related to having such a large number of Finns in Michigan.

Children who were both Finnish and Indian were put in a hard place by this situation. The Finndian epitaph was originally derogatory, but in modern times many of those with mixed cultures use this name for themselves.

"I do not usually use this name myself, but it is used in spoken language," Mavis says.

Many children that were both Finnish and Indian, met with harassment and bullying.

“My sisters and I were bullied because people knew our mother was Indian. I do not even want to say publicly what kind of names were applied to us.”

Photo p. 4 Caption: Arne Vainio’s father and wife, Mabel Durant (Arne Vainio’s parents) in a wedding photo taken in 1957. (Picture: Arne Vainio’s personal album.)

The memory is so painful that Mantila’s eyes fill with tears when thinking back on it. Nowadays, the indigenous people’s situation is better: in school one can even study Ojibwa language.

Mantila says she has more experience with Ojibwe than with Finnish language.

“But recently in the last few years I have find out more about my Finnish side, visited Finland with friends and done some family research.”

She tells about her visit last summer to Jyväskylä with a friend and describes what it felt like to visit a Finnish beach sauna for the first time and how it was after swimming in a cold lake.

“It was an unbelievable experience.”

**Minnesotan Arne Vainio’s** father’s grandparents moved to this state in the early 1900s – the grandfather from Jaala, the grandmother from Pori. His father, who was born in the US, owned a pub named “Good Luck Tavern” in the small town of Sturgeon.

The name of this place was not an omen, as while battling alcoholism his father committed suicide when Arne was four years old. The boy stayed with his grandparents and was raised by them.

“They spoke mainly Finnish and I grew up among the Finnish community,” Vainio recounts.

Photo p. 5 Caption: Arne Vainio’s high school senior picture. (Picture: Arne Vainio’s personal album.)

His own life was not easy either. Vainio’s life story became known to Finns due to Rauli Virtanen’s film documentary shown in 2008. In it, Vainio also tells of his own alcoholism and suicide attempt at age 17. After getting over the worst, he worked in construction, as a machine operator, bar tender and as a shareholder of a sawmill with some Finns.

Vainio’s life took a new turn when a male relative was struck with a medical crisis while feeding his livestock. The arrival of the ambulance at the reservation took an hour, while the bystanders did not know what to do but watch the man die.

“I decided that I never want to be in this type of situation and I registered for a twice weekly first aid course. It was the first time when I was surrounded by people who were passionate about something in their career,” Vainio remembers.

Vainio returned to his work in autobody repair. One day he came upon a scene when a large lumber truck had collided into a turning platform truck.

“The woman driving the truck had a broken neck and her mouth was full of blood. As I was the first one on the scene, I got the blood out of her mouth and held her head in place. As she was transferred into the ambulance the woman whispered to me ‘Thank you.’”

Vainio’s action saved the woman’s life.

“That type of experience defines you as a human being.”

Photo p. 6 Caption: Arne’s Finnish grandmother Amanda Vainio. (Picture: Arne Vainio’s personal album.)

Vainio took up studying: first to become a fireman and paramedic. Later he entered medical school.

“No one in the family had been to university. I was a really bad student, and immediately took on too challenging courses.”

**Nowadays**, Vainio works as a doctor in the Minnesota’s Fond du Lac Reservation’s on-site clinic. Driving into the reservation, the post office boxes are teeming with Finnish names.

“The Ojibwa and Finnish people have a lot in common. Both have a strong relationship with the Earth. My father was known for his hunting and fishing skills – not the legal kind one fears. The Indians took him in as one of their own.”

Another thing in common was that both Finns and Indians experienced discrimination.

“The Finns came here later, so all the good jobs and land were already taken. Many of those already here did not want them here. They ostracized them in the same way as they did to indigenous people.”

When he was young Vainio often experienced no real acceptance from either culture he represents.

Picture p. 7 Caption: Arne Vainio in the Duluth, Minnesota shelter for tribal members who are homeless and suffer domestic violence. Duluth’s population is only two percent Indian but among the homeless they are nearly a third. (Picture: Johannes Kotkavirta)

“Nowadays I accept both my Finnish and Ojibwa sides of myself. I work on the reservation and people have accepted me into the community. When I am at work I am Ojibwa, but the Finnish side comes out when we sauna with my friend every Saturday. Or when we sit and talk, or sometimes when we sit only in silence. In my opinion, Finnishness is a wonderful heritage.”

After the documentary was shown in Finland, Vainio began to receive contact from Finns. Soon he had a slew of new cousins.

In 2010 Vainio at last visited Finland, which to him reminded him strongly of Minnesota.

“When we were landing, I felt I was home even before the wheels touched down on the runway. I thought of my 19-year-old grandmother watching from the ship as Finland moved away becoming smaller and smaller, knowing that she would never have a chance to see it again. Then I felt that I brought her back home.”

Picture p. 8 Caption: Arne Vainio in front of the painted wall mural at the Duluth Indian housing apartments. The painting depicting “Water Protectors” honors exploited Indians and peoples who have been discriminated against. (Picture: Johannes Kotkavirta)

Johannes Kotkavirta, Duluth, Minnesota