

My name is Lennart Lindfors and I'm from Haparanda. I will tell you three short stories from the area in Swedish and one of the stories I will tell in Finnish also.

I call these three odd stories in and about Haparanda through history.

When Hanna Nuoliniemi, from Mattila, saw her first car.

This story was given to me by Johan Taavo from Mattila, who was born in 1893. He became over 90 years old, had a great memory and was a good storyteller. I interviewed him a few times. He later gave his farm to the local history society in Mattila.

The year was 1914 and World War I had bursted out and the whole of Europe was occupied. Everyone who had to travel between east and western Europe had to go through Haparanda and Tornio (which belonged to Russia). Haparanda was given the epithet the Needle Eye. The railroad to Karungi had recently been built and two thousand horses was daily driven carrying goods, mail and people between the railroad in Tornio to the railroad that was in construction in Karungi. The worldwide traffic crossed our cities. The road was of course worn out and in a bad shape.

One day a nice car came down the road in Mattila. It probably got a flat tire and had to stop. And so it did, right in front of the Nuoliniemi farm, which still lies near the main road. The lady of the house, Hanna, was outside and saw her first car and a very well-dressed woman get out of it. She came to the very surprised Hanna and said: "I was born a Danish princess." Who was she? She was the Danish princess Dagmar who now was the Russian empress Maria Fjodorovna and she was on her way home from the Riviera with hundreds of horse carriages with travel goods. Everybody had to go this way between east and west. In Tornio she was met by the emperor's luxury train which would take her home to Saint Petersburg. Her own luxury train later drove over the ice from Haparanda to the Finnish Russian side. You can now see her train in the Finnish railroad museum in Hyvinkä. An unexpected meeting with a Russian empress in the village of Mattila in Haparanda 1914.

The first days in December 1939, just after Soviet had attacked Helsinki on November 30th, refugees began to flow in to Haparanda. One who had to be at the station as an interpreter almost every day was Eva Nikula, who was the Finnish editor at Haaparannan Lehti. She has told me this story. Eva was born Lemmberg, the famous Finnish journalist family. One day she saw a very famous old man sitting in the first class waiting room. She was just about to go and interview him when a perky little girl came up to him and said: "There is free soup downstairs if you are hungry." "Thank you, my little friend," the older man said, "but I have enough money for food and will have much more when I return from this journey." Eva thought that this was so cute that she didn't want to interrupt. The man was the Finnish author Frans Emil Silanpää who was on his way to Stockholm to receive the Nobel Prize in literature. It was in the beginning of December 1939. The Nobel Prize is awarded on December 10th. Even he had to sit in the waiting room at Haparanda railway station. Just like everyone else who had to travel between Tornio and Haparanda.

Haparanda has received many epithets through its history. Here is another one.

In August, in the year 2000, I was a travel guide during a week-long-trip for inhabitants of Norrbotten to Åland. It was an amazing trip in a beautiful marine landscape where most things were about shipping and navigation. Like Venice in a bigger format. One day we were on an exhibition to the northernmost island of Åland's four thousand islands. It is called Geta. There we stayed in front of a restaurant with a beautiful view. It is called Solturna and is Åland's highest located restaurant. My guests asked in what direction north was? It was cloudy and we had driven/been driving for a long time so I had lost my bearings. I said wait a while I'll go to the restaurant and ask them. I went inside through a backdoor and came into the kitchen. There was a big chef chopping onions with a large knife. I excused myself and asked him "Where is north?" "Haparanda is there" he said and pointed with the big knife. I was as surprised as you might be now. I asked him one more time "Where is north?" He again pointed with his knife and said "Haparanda is there. There is nothing between us and Haparanda." Then I had to introduce myself and tell him that I was from Haparanda. He understood my surprise then. A few days later I was back home in Haparanda and working as a guide for a bus load of prominent persons. During that time we were actively engaged in the project Provincia Botniensis. This time it was about establishment of a common judicial system at the border meaning courthouse, police etc.

The guests that participated were justice ministers, land governors and director-generals for both customs and the police from the countries concerned. And the heads of the local governments participated also.

We were going to visit these departments where each head of management would tell us about their organisations and facilities.

We were standing outside Stadshotellet in Haparanda in the morning watching all the participants gather from different directions while waiting for our bus. Everyone was carrying a name tag.

Next to me on the hotel stairs a man was standing and I bent forward a little bit to see who he was. It was the governor of the Autonomous Åland Landscape Board. Which is equal to land governor or head of government.

I felt that I had to seize the opportunity to introduce myself and greet him welcome to Haparanda. I informed him that I had returned from Åland the day before and told him about my fantastic experience there.

He said it is right! We say Haparanda about the north, since there is nothing between us and Haparanda. Furthermore he said that he had his house right next to the slope towards the sea and there is nothing between the north and Haparanda but the sea.

In Åland there are three ordinary cardinal directions: east, south, west and then there is Haparanda!