Tanni Kents

BORN 1920

I was my parents' first child, born in Kuressaare on 22 July 1920. My mother and father met as university students in St. Petersburg in 1918, where they were both studying law. Turbulent times and the Russian Revolution brought each of them by different routes back to Estonia, where they met again at the opening of the Constituent Assembly on 23 April 1919.[1] My father, Timotheus Grünthal was an elected delegate from Saaremaa and my mother Veera Poska, the daughter of foreign minister Jaan Poska. Their lively correspondence culminated in the decision to get married. Their wedding took place in Haapsalu on 24 September 1919, and the young couple immediately went to Saaremaa, because my father had been elected chairman of the Saare county government. He was 26 years old, my mother 21.

For my mother, who had grown up in Tallinn in a large family of eight children, it was probably difficult to get used to the quiet, mock "German"[2] and provincial nature of Kuressaare. In the large old manor house that came with my father's job, the dictator was Tiiu, the housekeeper of the former German owners. Mother found something to keep herself busy as a teacher in the Saaremaa Central High School, where she met young Estonian intellectuals, some of whom were later among my parents' friends. A great blow to my mother was the sudden death of her beloved father in March 1920. My father and

[1] See Chronology.

[2] *Kadakasakslus*—mentality that people of good taste aspired to be like the Baltic Germans, imitating their culture in matters of fashion, interior design, and manners.

mother were unable to attend the funeral in Tallinn, since the sea was full of drifting ice floes in early spring, and connections with the mainland were broken. This prompted the decision to leave Saaremaa for the mainland in order to complete their interrupted university studies. My birth did not change these plans; Father went on ahead to Tartu and re-enrolled in the university; my mother followed with me a few months later. It was hard to find a babysitter, we had no relatives in Tartu. My mother attended lectures in the main building of the university, and it is said that I frequently slept in my pram underneath the windows of the lecture hall.

When I was two years old my little sister was born, who died a few years later of tubercular brain infection. At the time we were living in Tallinn. Immediately upon graduating from university Father got a job as candidate for an official's position in the Tartu-Võru Court of Common Appeals. It took my mother over four more years to complete her university studies, and by then she already had four children.

My memories of our time in Tartu are very limited; most of them come from stories my parents told. We lived in two furnished rooms in the five-room apartment of an impoverished German spinster. The rooms were filled with old moth-eaten furniture. Even now I find it hard to comprehend how my mother was able to continue her university studies in such conditions, and how my father wrote up his legal opinions for the court. According to Father's stories, our meals usually consisted of rutabaga and carrots baked in the oven, along with smoked lamb, which was sent to us from my father's parents' farm in Muhu. Later we had a household helper, a cheerful, hardworking woman from Võrumaa, whom I called Vana Maake. I remember how, on the day a few years later when we moved to Tallinn, we said goodbye to Vana Maake in the Tartu train station. She cried and cried, and I tried to comfort her with our family photograph, telling her that if she looked at it, we would be closer to her.

My father had been appointed judge of the Tallinn-Haapsalu Court of Common Appeals, and our life in Tallinn was quite different from our life in Tartu. We now lived in my late grandfather's house on Poska Street in Kadrioru. I remember that there was a garden that resembled a park, and a large bathroom in the house—marble steps led into the bathtub. My mother's brother Jüri, who was orphaned, now belonged to our family; his mother had died when he was four years old. Living in the house were my mother's five sisters and her brother

Jaan with his wife. Then there were big changes: the death of my sister, my father's illness; Jüri's departure to join his other sister; my mother, sister, and brother going to Nõmme. My father had to go to Finland for treatment, to a TB sanatorium near Kuopio. My mother was fortunate enough to land a job as an attorney in the Tallinn Legal Aid Bureau, as all of my father's judge's salary went towards the cost of the sanatorium in Finland. What I remember from that sad time are Father's letters and postcards to us children. All of the mail we received from Father had been pressed with a hot iron before we saw it— in hopes that all the tuberculosis bacteria would be killed.

We spent summers in Haapsalu, at Grandfather's lovely summer home, which was located directly opposite the Kursal on Poska Avenue. There were many young people and children staying there; my favorites were Villem Grünthal-Ridala's three sons, Esmo, Vilmo and Veljo. Our favorite activities were track and field competitions, organized by my brothers Ivar and Esmo. I was no athletic star, and never got first place in anything; Esmo and Jüri's legs were much longer. Jüri would sometimes go to the castle gardens to play tennis, but the rest of us did not have tennis racquets. Of course a large part of our time was taken up with swimming; the so-called African Beach was only ten minutes away. We also went by motorboat to Paralepa Beach.

My father's health did not improve, and my parents decided to go to Tartu to get a second medical opinion. It turned out that there was tuberculosis in my father's left kidney, and that it would be necessary to remove the afflicted kidney. Dr. Wanach, at that time the director of the second surgical clinic, performed this operation, which in those days was life threatening. The operation was successful and Father's health started to improve. Our family was reunited, and Father went back to work. We continued to live at Nõmme until Father was appointed a state judge. The State Court was located in Tartu, on Veski Street. We moved back to Tartu, where we lived first on Veski Street, then on Hurt Street. Later on we moved into our own house on Hurda 12, which was nationalized by the communists in 1940.

One summer, it must have been in 1933, Grandfather came in his motorboat from Muhu to Haapsalu, and took Father along with the two older children—Ivar and myself—to my father's home on the island of Muhu. The boat was left in Kuivastu harbor, and we rode by horse and wagon to Luiskama, which was three kilometers inland from Kuivastu. Luiskama was a private farm, two kilometers from

the village of Simiste, and about three kilometers from the village of Rässa. Ivar and I slept in the storehouse. There was a rye field under our window. For the first time in our lives we were in the country, at a farm. The farmhouse, built in 1906 had a roof made of reeds, but was otherwise quite modern. There were several rooms besides the main room, where there was a stove and a bread oven, as well as a long, broad dining table. My father's brother Jaan, his wife, and three children lived at the farm together with my grandparents. Of the children, Jaan was a year, Fely three years, and Aadi nine years younger than me.

My grandmother Riste was a small, thin woman, who always wore Muhu folk costume along with the traditional headdress. She was the middle sister of seven, and was married at the age of 16. Even in those days (1933) she still had several skirts and shirts from her hope chest in the storehouse.

Grandfather was tall, and he had a long beard. He was very interested in newspapers, though there was little time for reading. The soil was of poor quality, and thus fishing provided an important supplement to the diet. Grandfather and Jaan went to sea often, caught eel, and sold them to the fish-well-boats.[3] Sometimes small eel would be smoked in the yard in a smoke-oven. In the springtime, there was a great yield of smelt and ocean perch. The fish were cleaned, lightly salted and then dried. We usually ate boiled fish with potatoes. First the potatoes would be boiled until they were half-soft, then the dried fish would be put on top. What good, tasty food that was! Grandmother baked her own bread; the bread bowl was very old, brought from Pöide in Saaremaa. The bread was sweet-and-sour rye, made with boiling water. Grandmother put one such sweet oval-shaped loaf of bread in my backpack when we fled from Estonia. They raised a sizeable flock of sheep; from them they got wool, and greatcoats were sewn from the skins. In the winter lamb was a main source of food, alongside fish. Over ten cows were kept at Luiskama; every morning they walked around the herd-path to Ülissaare by the sea, and followed the lead cow home in the evening.

It was during that summer that Grandfather, along with Father and Kolk, the master builder began planning a house for us on the

[3] Fish-well-boats: larger collection boats with a well in the deck to keep freshly-caught sea fish.

forester's plot next to the Luiskama farmlands. My father had purchased the land from the state. My father had been forest warden there at one time, and he had planted the young pine forest. For the foundation, large flagstones were brought from somewhere in Saaremaa. Now, 70 years later, they are as bright and strong as ever. Father planned to build the house as a place to live in when he was old. There was a front porch with a stone floor, a spacious front room, and a winding staircase leading to the second floor. On the ground floor there was a roomy living room, kitchen, three large bedrooms and a wc. On the upper floor were two more bedrooms, one of which had a balcony with a view of the sea, shining blue in the distance. A few hundred meters on toward Kuivastu was the new Simiste village primary school—a modern six-grade schoolhouse built in the 1930s. Our house had central heating, which, just like in the schoolhouse, was constructed by well traveled Muhu master builder Kolk, who had studied in America. Beginning in 1934 we spent all of our summers on the island of Muhu.

There were many Russian Orthodox believers in Muhu, and our extended family was among them. The Orthodox Church was at Hellamaa, and the graveyard was there, too. Every year 29 June was the church's name day, a great holiday, as well as my father's birthday, and we always went to church with the whole family.

Every other day Ivar and I would go to the Kuivastu post office to pick up the mail. Father subscribed to several newspapers, and for us children there was the magazine *Brain Gymnastics* with crossword puzzles and other brain teasers. My aunt's husband, Eduard Laaman, was the chief editor of *Vaba Maa*, and my father thought his editorials were the best. *Päevaleht* was a large-format newspaper, and the wind would mess it up. *Meie Maa* was the local Saaremaa newspaper: my father had founded it, and he was fond of it, because it always informed him about the island people and their activities. Of course we also subscribed to *Postimees*, that in my father's opinion was a well-edited newspaper, better than that of the Farmers' Party, *Kaja*. To the children, the most interesting newspaper was *Esmaspäev*, a gossip rag of sorts. When we went to the post office we took a large bag with us, to carry all the letters and newspapers. On the way home, we walked straight across the pastures, the *karja-arud*, as they said in Muhu. We found ourselves a shady tree and started reading the newspapers, folding them carefully after we finished.

Later on, my mother would often be abroad during the summers, attending all sorts of international conferences;[4] the housekeeper who kept things running at home was Tikka Juula. She would come every morning and leave in the evenings. In her youth Juula had been a cook at the manor house, and knew how to make very tasty things to eat. From her I learned how to bake a chicken, and how to make all sorts of desserts. Grandmother taught me how to bake whole wheat bread; she was worried that a girl who did not know how to knead and bake white bread and whole wheat bread would never find a husband. I never learned how to make rye bread, though, because I thought that there were no kneading troughs in the city, and that there everyone bought their bread at the store.

Ivar and I were exempted from farm work, since Father thought children should swim in the summertime. And so we were at the seaside a great deal, and only helped with the haying and weeding of the vegetable garden. Unlike my younger sister Vera, who was good friends with my cousin Fely, Ivar and I were not interested in farm work; they would go from farm to farm in the neighborhood and take part in working bees.

My Muhu summers brought me closer to the relatives on my father's side. Up till that time I had only known my mother's family. The trip to Muhu and Kuressaare in the spring of 1935 was one of my unforgettable memories. After leaving there as a little baby, I had never been back to Kuressaare.

And so we spent all our summers in Muhu. Meanwhile I had begun attending school. My first school day was 13 April 1931. Since I had been frequently ill as a child, and since my mother had a private schoolteacher's certificate, she had the right to teach me at home. Every spring I arranged my examinations at the Tartu Primary School No.1 on Botaanika Street. In the spring of 1931 I was placed in the fourth grade, and in the fall entered the fifth. I graduated from the six-grade Estonian Youth Association Girls' Gymnasium (ENKSTG) in June 1933, and from the high school by the same name in spring 1938. In high school I chose the humanities branch, where we learned Latin, in addition to German and English. Most of our schoolteachers were

[4] Veera Poska-Grünthal (1898–1986) was active in several international organizations for peace and women's rights, and attended several Congresses of the Women's International Peace and Freedom League.

women. The principal was Hans Karu, who had graduated from Tartu University in ancient languages. Hans Karu had taken part in the War of Independence as a schoolboy and was very patriotic minded, as well as a strict disciplinarian. Hans Karu's wife Marta Karu, who taught history, was the sister of well-known writer Hugo Raudsepp. She was a very witty woman with a fine sense of humor, a member of the Estonian Women University Students' Association. My primary school Estonian teacher, Amanda Kösta had a strong influence on me, opening my eyes to Estonian poetry. Martha Niggol, who taught German, had many original ideas about how to arouse our interest in foreign languages.

I have always been very interested in books. I do not remember that I had any particular schoolbooks at home, though there was a great deal of Estonian literature and belles lettres and translations from world literature. I was quite young when I read August Jakobson's novel *Vaeste patuste alev* (The Town of the Poor Sinners), which had received an award in the literary competition sponsored by the publishing house "Loodus." I did not understand very much of this book, but what remained with me was a poor woman's saying that women needed to be like racehorses at the hippodrome, slender and fast.

In our home there was a library instead of a parlor, with Father's writing desk under the window, floor to ceiling bookshelves on two walls, and a large fireplace between them. The only furniture besides Father's writing desk and chair was two high-backed leather armchairs. Here I would often sit, my feet pulled up under me, reading. Every child had a desk; mine was white, with curved rococo legs and drawers on both sides. My sleeping couch divided my sister's and my room in half, and behind it a white curtain hung down from the ceiling. During the day I put my bedclothes in the white wardrobe. We both had a window overlooking the garden. There were pink rugs on the floor that came from our grandparents' one-time Kadrioru home.

The most popular room for the whole family was the dining room, where the piano stood, and, above that, Grandmother's portrait. From the dining room a door opened onto the veranda. In the dining room there was a white-tiled stove, the back side of which warmed my sister's and my room. Instead of a sideboard there were built-in shelves, protected by glass doors, and cabinets below, where the coffee- and lunch dishes inherited from Grandmother were kept, the tableware and tablecloths in the drawers below. On one shelf was a radio. Next to the

cabinet was a wide door with glass panels from floor to ceiling, which took up most of the space of that wall, but which gave light to the front room. My mother was very interested in modern interior architecture, and so, following a Scandinavian model, there were many wardrobe cabinets. There were many cabinets and storage spaces in the kitchen as well; we did not have a refrigerator, and things were kept cold in the pantry. In the basement was a laundry room with a laundry-boiling kettle and one room partially filled with sand, where carrots and rutabagas were kept all winter; on the shelves were bags of potatoes, and barrels of pickles and sauerkraut.

From the kitchen a door led to the glassed-in veranda, and a small front room, from there one entered the bathroom, the servants' room, the dining room, the large vestibule, and the WC. I remember that in the winter clothes were dried in the attic, where there was also a clothing press for sheets and towels.

My brothers' rooms also had windows facing the garden. I particularly remember one large window where Ivar would secretly let me in when I was sometimes late getting home from school parties. Throughout my high school years I always had to be home at eleven at the latest, but the parties always ended at eleven. Every night at eleven my father would lock the front door on the first floor, since I did not have a key. I had to ring the doorbell and get scolded by my father. When I entered university, father gave me my personal key to the front door.

We young people were raised during the Estonian Republic. This was our epoch, a time that belonged to us. Everything that came before, which we studied from the history books was the distant past, and it hardly touched me. When the whole family was gathered around the dinner table, Father and Mother would discuss interesting court cases from their legal practices; we children talked about our everyday problems. There was no time for history, because the present was what counted.

Since my mother worked as an attorney outside the home, we had a young woman at home who taught us children German. The one who lasted the longest was Marie Kaup, who went to Germany in 1939 with the *Umsiedlung*.[5] I think she was a Germanized Estonian (*kadakasakslane*) who had attended a German girls' school. The household

[5] The Umsiedlung (resettlement) was Adolf Hitler's call to Baltic-Germans to repatriate to Germany, beginning in fall 1939. See also Chronology.

help was always a Russian-speaking woman. This way I learned how to speak both German and Russian as a child, but unfortunately not to read or write these languages.

In high school the students of our era participated enthusiastically in extracurricular activities. There were intramural volleyball competitions, and there were two girls' teams which represented our school in competitions between schools. I was not a good volleyball player, but I was more interested in the track and field competitions held in the spring. We also had a student government, headed by an "elder," an elected leader of the student body, and a board of directors. There were clubs as well, and for a few years I directed the drama circle. I also participated in the literary club. An interesting feature of these was the so-called "literary trial," where the defendant was a character from a well-known novel; there was a prosecution, defense, and witnesses, and the proceedings were presided over by a judge. In the last literary trial I took part in during spring 1938, the defendant was an Estonian young person of the time, who after lengthy accusations and a passionate speech of the defense, was declared innocent in view of extenuating circumstances, especially the surrounding lack of interest toward young people. Now, 60 years later, I feel that the Estonian young person at that time had a great deal of independent mindedness and self-confidence, which gave him courage and moral support during the difficult times that lay ahead.

Already in my early years of high school I had chosen law as my future profession. Doubtless my home environment had a significant influence: my father, Timotheus Grünthal, was a state judge, and my mother one of Estonia's first female attorneys. Her father, Jaan Poska, had been a lawyer, as well as three of her sisters and two of her brothers. The youngest, Jüri, lived with us while attending university in Tartu, and graduated from the law faculty in exile in Stockholm. My mother's other brother, Jaan, participated in the War of Independence as a schoolboy. He was imprisoned during the first Russian occupation and died in prison.

In 1938 there was such a large number of applicants to most of the departments of Tartu University that competitive entrance examinations were organized. It was particularly difficult to get into the faculty of medicine, but for the law faculty as well there were twice as many applicants as the 150 who were admitted. One of the examinations was oral, the other written, with a choice of several topics. I chose the

political situation in Europe in 1938. I was fortunate to be admitted, though I was in the middle rather than at the top of the list.

After being admitted to university, I also chose to become a member of a sorority, and upon the recommendation of my parents I chose the Estonian Women University Students Assocation.

I was married during the German occupation on 24 January 1942 in Tartu. A few days before my wedding I passed my last examination in the faculty of law, and presented my diploma thesis in early spring 1942, entitled "The Development of Fixed-Rate Mortgage in the Baltic Legal Codex." I received my university graduation papers one day before my 22nd birthday in July 1942. I had studied in the Tartu University law faculty for seven semesters, and ex-matriculated for one semester, from fall 1940 to January 1941 because of my father's profession during the Estonian Republic—he was the head of the civil law department of the Supreme Court of the Estonian Republic. My tuition rate had been raised so high that I could not afford to pay it. I got a job at the Tartu Girls' Dormitory as a lower level official, saved money, and was able to continue my studies in January 1941. I began my studies in the Tartu University Faculty of Law during the Estonian Republic, and according to the curriculum of that time. In 1940 the Russian Communist occupation destroyed the legal structure of the Estonian Republic and replaced the laws with communist ones. Marxism-Leninism and Communist Party history became required subjects, which were prerequisites for everything else. There was a great difference between the professors of the Republic and the occupation eras; the previous scholarly standards were replaced by conformity to false teachings built on communist ideology. When the war broke out, the German occupation came to Estonia, and once again we had to get to know a new legal system. The knowledge foundation of my first four semesters of study proved to be most valuable.

When I got married, we got our first very own apartment together—a small room with the use of the kitchen in the apartment of a Tartu high police official, who had been deported to Siberia. My husband, Kaljo Pill, had graduated from the forestry department of the Faculty of Agriculture, and was writing his diploma thesis while working at the Tartu Heating Bureau. I did not have a job at first, and in the first spring of my marriage was preoccupied with my diploma thesis; later, when we were able to move into a larger room in a modern building on Puiestee Street, my main task was furnishing our modest home and

procuring daily food by running from one store to another. Our first child, Jüri, was born on 27 August 1943. Opposite our apartment on Puiestee Street was a military airfield, and the air raids were very frequent, since the war was moving steadily closer to us.

My sister Vera, who was five years younger than I, was in her last year at the ENKS Girls Gymnasium. The school office was evacuated to Tallinn, and the graduating students had to go there to claim their final report cards. Since my mother had been in St. Petersburg during the revolution in 1918, and experienced the hardships and turbulent circumstances there, she felt that little Jüri should be taken from Tartu to the country. And so Kaljo took me and seven-month old Jüri to his relatives in Vara parish, not far from Tartu; my younger sister and younger brother went to the island of Muhu to my grandparents. My brother who was four years younger had already fled to Finland that fall, and was in the Finnish army. My husband, father, and mother stayed on in their jobs in Tartu. Thus a few restless months passed, the front came closer and closer, and my family decided that if one did not want to fall into the hands of the Russian army, it would be necessary to flee Estonia. At the time clandestine boat traffic was liveliest in Hiiumaa. We received reports that in the next few days a motor-sailboat named *Lootus* (Hope) would be leaving for Sweden. Jüri, Vera, and Tommi and I were in Haapsalu together, where Mother had rented a small apartment. I do not remember how Jüri and I got to Hiiumaa and onto the *Lootus*, but Vera and Tommi stayed on in Haapsalu. Besides a few crew members, the passengers on the *Lootus* were exclusively women and children. We had to wait for several days for a favorable wind, and then diphtheria broke out among the children. In the meantime Kaljo had gotten from Tartu to Haapsalu, and followed us to Hiiumaa. He took us off the boat. We wandered back again across the island of Hiiumaa and back to Haapsalu, Jüri in his little carriage, with a suitcase laid across the carriage containing our only treasure, documents and photos. Jüri's diapers and Grandmother's big loaf of rye bread were in a backpack. On some kind of boat we got back across the bay to Haapsalu. Mother had information that along with the Estonian Swedes (*rannarootslased*) anyone who could prove Swedish ancestry would be taken along from Haapsalu to Sweden. My grandmother had been born Constance Ekström; her father, Ivar Ekström, had been born in Estonia and run a master glassworker's workshop in Tallinn in the Old Market Square. My grandmother's family had been members

of the Tallinn Swedish congregation, where they had been confirmed. Thus my mother, along with her younger sister and brother had the right to travel to Sweden on a Swedish ship, while this right was not extended to my father, myself, to Kaljo, or to little Jüri. And so we lived in Haapsalu in late summer, waiting for the chance to travel to Sweden. A new problem emerged, since the Germans forbade all men from leaving the country. Neither my father nor Kaljo was considered mobilizable, my father because of his age, and Kaljo because of heart problems. By coincidence, my father and Kaljo were able to get passage on a motorized sailboat belonging to some people from Muhu; the ship left the beach near Tallinn, and had a favorable passage across the stormy sea to Sweden.

My mother, Weera Poska-Grünthal, writes in her memoirs: *Finally the long awaited Swedish "white ship" the* Juhan*, arrived in Haapsalu. Tanni piled our small number of worldly goods on the baby carriage along with Jüri, and so we made our way to the harbor, with my younger son and daughter in tow. No one knew when the boat would begin loading, and when it would pull out, since there were German patrols everywhere, and everything depended on them. We did not want to leave the harbor, and spent the night in a storage shed close to the beach.*

The next morning I had to be parted from the children, since I had to go to Tallinn to reach an agreement with the man from Muhu, Kolk, about how my husband and son-in-law would travel. My heart ached as I left my children, but there was nothing to be done. This was during the last days of August 1944. In Tallinn I arrived at the agreed-upon address in Kadrioru under cover of darkness. We did not need to exchange many words; people from Muhu knew each other. I was instructed as to where and when I had to go to the beach with the men, and had to memorize a password. I passed on the information to Tommi and Kalju. Everything had to happen as unassumingly as possible. We sat in the streetcar like strangers, and the men could not carry any baggage. Since I was not going along, I carried Timm's briefcase and Kaljo's backpack.

The journey to the harbor in the darkness went without a hitch. Finally we arrived at the agreed-upon spot on the beach. How long would we have to wait? Would the boat even come? This was an unnecessary worry. Suddenly the shape of a man emerged from the darkness. Was this him? We waited to hear the agreed-upon password. Kaljo and Timm's responses were acceptable to the man. All three retreated, their figures melting together into a single shadow. I was alone. When and where would I see them again?

The next morning I went back to Haapsalu. There I found only my daughter Vera waiting. The Juhan had weighed anchor early that same morning. I hurried to the harbour. The whole harbour was empty of people, and there were only some bags and suitcases left behind. I glanced over at a baby carriage

standing a little ways away, and recognized that it as Jüri's, with a few items of children's clothing inside.

Only later in Sweden did I hear the story of how Tanni was able to get herself and her year-old child onto the boat, without a permit. She had spent the entire day keeping watch in the harbor. Only those with the requisite permit were allowed to board the boat. When night fell, orders were issued that mothers and small children could board the boat to spend the night. Tanni grabbed Jüri and hurried on, leaving the carriage and the baggage in Tommi's car. In the morning she refused to leave, saying, you can throw me and the child overboard, but I will not leave this boat on my own. And finally they left her alone.

And so all of us made it to Sweden, even if it was on four different boats. The last to arrive was my mother along with my sister Vera. *Juhan,* the boat Jüri and I were on, and where my little brother Tommi was a stowaway, also made it safely to Swedish shores. From the harbor we were taken to a delousing sauna, where our clothing was disinfected with heat and then put in a refugee camp in the resort at Tylösand, from where we were later transferred to Mölle camp in southern Sweden. A few weeks later, in Tylösand I got news that Kaljo, too, had escaped, and soon he came to join us. But there were many who drowned on small boats on the stormy Baltic Sea, and who never reached Sweden.

In the camp we busied ourselves studying Swedish, which was a prerequisite for entering the Swedish labor market. My mother and father had gotten so-called archival work at Stockholm university, where several former professors from Tartu University had already found work.

Finally, in the spring of 1945, we got out of refugee camp. Kaljo got archival work at the forestry university near Stockholm, where several forestry specialists among Estonian refugees had already found work. We got one room in my parents' two room apartment, which was located in a suburb of Stockholm on the island of Lidingö. In those days there was a great shortage of apartments in Stockholm; we entered our names on the list of a cooperative apartment building that was being built and paid our share. But we waited so long that seven years later, when our turn came to purchase an apartment, we were already living in our own little house in Montreal.

The Estonians were not the first war refugees in Sweden: the Finns and Norwegians were there ahead of us, but they returned to their homelands at the end of the war. Sweden had succeeded in remaining

neutral throughout the war, so they had no idea of the horrors of war, and they knew very little about communism. The people had an anti-German sentiment, since Norway had been occupied by the Germans. And Estonians were regarded as Nazis, since we had not fled from the Germans, but from the Russians. The Soviet ambassador to Sweden at that time was Mme Kollontai, a remarkably sociable and charming Russian diplomat, who even had connections with the Swedish royal family. Consequently, Sweden became the first European country to recognize the communist occupation of Estonia not only *de facto*, but also *de jure*. Thus Sweden handed the gold of the Republic of Estonia over to the Soviet Union, as well as all privately owned vehicles by which Estonians had fled over the sea to Sweden. In 1946 Baltic soldiers were extradited to the Russians. Sweden lacked the courage to say "no" to the demands of the Soviet Union. This brought along with it the secondary migration of many Estonians, since Sweden seemed to be too insecure a place to build a permanent home.

For that reason Kaljo and I decided to travel on to Canada with our two little boys Jüri and Jaan. We feared that the communist occupation of Estonia would last for a good long time yet. We left Sweden in spring 1951 on the Swedish steamship "Gripsholm." We arrived in Canada on the 2nd of May, landing in Halifax harbor in the province of Nova Scotia. Our provisional plan was to begin our lives in Toronto, but a four hour layover in Montreal left us with such a good impression—the downtown area reminded us strongly of European cities—that we stayed in Montreal and lived there until 1980.

Kaljo found work almost immediately as a draughtsman in a British firm, later as an accountant. We rented a three-room apartment on a street where there were already several Estonian families ahead of us. There was no apartment shortage in Montreal. We soon received the boxes of books and the two mattresses that had been sent after us from Sweden. From the first paycheck we bought the children the simplest of iron bedsteads, while we ourselves slept on the floor for many years, saving money for the deposit for our own home. Kaljo built a temporary table from our book boxes, where we ate, with orange crates for chairs. From somewhere he was able to obtain bits of boards, and thus both of our sons got desks. Carpentry tools could be borrowed for a small fee from the French janitor of our building.

I had the good fortune of finding a nice elderly Estonian lady whose daughter worked as a typist in a Canadian firm. We gave them

one of our rooms, and in exchange the old lady agreed to look after our children. And so I was able to go to work myself, finding myself a job by answering a want ad in the newspaper. I was worried about my lack of English skills, but for a cataloguer it was sufficient, since I knew the alphabet. We were young, very thrifty, modest, and undemanding. Housing was cheap, and I often made soup for supper. On the 1st of May 1955 we were able to move into our own little house on Lavigne street in the Montreal suburb of Cartierville. The children each had their own room on the second floor, and on the first floor were three rooms and a nice sunny kitchen, from which a few steps led down to the garden.

It was one kilometer to our children's school; there was a schoolbus, but that cost money, and so they walked to school. There were not too many students in the six-grade elementary school, and the principal was an older woman, the teachers young. The school was located in a very pleasant quiet place, away from the noise of traffic, its spacious schoolyard surrounded by old trees. On Saturdays we took the children to Estonian scout meetings, which took place, as did all Estonian activities and events, in the social hall of St. John's church. Sometimes we went to church on Sundays. For many years I sang in the Estonian mixed choir, and the rehearsals were in the same St. John's church.

In 1952 my mother founded a women's magazine, *Triinu*, which for over 40 years was a channel of communication between Estonians who had landed on different continents as refugees. Beginning in the 1970s I helped my mother with the editing of *Triinu*, carrying on correspondence and gathering articles from Estonians in Canada, the USA, and Australia. From 1985 to1995 (when the magazine ceased publication), I was the editor-in-chief of *Triinu*.

Triinu was published four times a year, and included writings about the lives and activities of Estonians outside Estonia, especially the work of preserving Estonian culture abroad. Triinu strove to support Estonian traditional handicrafts, publishing the writings of ethnographers about the correct way to make folk costumes, about folk customs, and often also the use of Estonian folk patterns in handicrafts. Connections with Estonian folk traditions helped preserve our identity among all the different influences and impulses we encountered abroad.

Triinu was first intended to be a women's magazine, but over the years it became a family magazine, publishing many scholarly and general education articles, most of them authored by Estonian women

(and men, too) who were recognized in their fields, After my father's unexpected death, my mother lived with us in Montreal temporarily for three years. There she founded the Montreal Estonian Women's Society, and which I headed for many years until moving to Toronto.

The children finished elementary school and went on to high school, then to college. Jüri, who had had a great interest in mathematics since childhood, went on to study engineering. Later, as a scholarship student in the USA, he defended his doctoral dissertation on city traffic planning. Jaan chose the philosophy department, and after graduating from the University of Toronto obtained his teaching credentials, specializing in the teaching of handicapped children. While in high school, both Jüri and Jaan were confirmed in the Estonian congregation of the St. Johns' Church. In those years there were many Estonian young people there, but by now the number of Estonians in Montreal has declined; young people have moved to other cities, and those who have stayed are older people. Both Jüri and Jaan also found jobs in Toronto; in Montreal, located in a French-speaking province, there was a preference for workers with a French Catholic background.

Kaljo and I were left to ourselves, though we always saw the children at Christmas, and in the summers in the country. Many years before, along with several other Estonian families, we had bought land for a summer home on the banks of a lake. Kaljo built a small house and a sauna there. We would often go to the country in the winter. The ground was hilly, so the skiing was good.

The year that Kaljo turned 50, he was diagnosed with a heart defect, which took him to his grave eight years later. The children were both in Toronto, and now I was living alone in our once happy, dear home. On weekdays I went to work, but the weekends were long and empty. Paul Kents, Kaljo's friend from Tartu University and Raimla fraternity days, was working as a geologist in South America for a Canadian company, and was also single due to a divorce. The company headquarters was in Montreal; when business took him to Montreal, he would stay with Estonian friends. We knew each other from Tartu days, but by that time Paul, who was eight years older than me, had already graduated from university and was an assistant in the geology department of Tallinn Technical University. In the fall of 1939 he was sent to study in USA, where he stayed on because of the war.

I married Paul Kents on 12 May 1979. I retired at the age of 60, in 1980. Paul worked until 1982, until age 70. Since Jüri and Jaan were

both in Toronto, and Paul's children were living near Toronto, I decided to sell my house in Montreal and move to Toronto. We bought an apartment in the Estonian apartment house "Eesti Kodu," and have been living here since 1982. It is like living in an Estonian village. We have five buildings: one six-story and four three-story, 144 households in all. There are monthly church services in Estonian, and we celebrate Estonian Independence Day, Mother's Day, Christmas, and other holidays together in the social hall. In the six-story building there is an office, a sauna and swimming pool, a women's handicraft room, a men's workshop, gym, billiard room, and a library along with a reading table and a laundry with washers and dryers. Three times a week the Estonian food shops send a truck, so that there is always Estonian food and bread to be had. There are also many clubs.

Paul and I sang for years in the Estonian mixed choir, and now we are members of the Old St. Andrews church choir. For over 60 years I have been a member of the Estonian Women University Students Association, and still participate actively in the Toronto branch activities.

My sons are both married to Canadians, and I am sad that my grandchildren no longer speak Estonian, though we have a strong sense of belonging in my family, and we spend much time together.

As I look back on my life, I can see that it has been very different from what I dreamed about as a schoolgirl. I had no way of imagining that one day I would have to live my life far away from Estonia. But I have always tried to remain an Estonian.

Tanni Kents died in Toronto in January 2005