

Rantakatu 9 as 4  
23500 Uusikaupunki  
Finland

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> April 1987

#### Tales from an Itinerant Jobber Letter 4

Dear Reader,

Well, as you see I've managed to purchase some air mail paper even if it meant travelling some 40 miles to get it. All the way back to Turkü. This letter, I hope will reveal to you all my adventures and travels to date so without further delay I'll begin this letter at the very point where I was to embark on the Silja Line "Wellamo" in Stockholm i.e. page 1 of my previous letter and exactly a month and two days ago.

I never realized just how cold it was then but when I left the lounge at the ferry terminal to fetch a pen from my briefcase in the car I became thoroughly chilled so I was certainly unprepared for the severe winter conditions I was to encounter.

As it was only a short drive to the "Wellamo" I was soon on board and in search of my cabin. In my previous letter I mentioned the quality of the DFDS ferries, well if you want the ultimate in luxury and opulence you must see the "Wellamo". It's like comparing a five star Hyatt Regency with your down-town suburban Holiday Inn. Launched in '85/'86 it carries 360 cars, 2000 passengers and has 568 cabins with a total of 1633 bunks. What the other 367 passengers do I don't know. Perhaps they dance the night away or share someone else's bunk, how cosy!

I truly regret the late departure of the boat at 9-30pm which afforded me little time to explore the ship. What little I did see certainly struck me with wonder and admiration.

Aladdin must have felt very much as I did when he first perceived his cave. To start with my cabin which was only category one compared favourably with the Commodore Class cabin of the DFDS and even the cabin door key was a plastic card about half the width of a credit card which makes it a joy to carry instead of a key with a large cabin number tag – you see how thankful I am for small mercies! Having showered and suitably attired myself I did no more than look to the restaurant deck as it was now in excess of 10pm. Here, once more I was struck by nothing but awe to see such beautiful surroundings. Why, even the self-catering cafeteria was very chic and the other restaurants became more opulent as you progress up the scale. I finally settled on the main restaurant, a room of such elegance that they had a well illuminated fountain plying in one corner – not quite as large as the one in the Place de la Concorde but I think you can imagine the picture. There was a nice large dance floor with an orchestra and to one side a spacious slow-curving stairway that led up to a surrounding balcony and a cocktail lounge so people could sit above and watch the dancing below. Having settled on a table I felt a certain obligation to order dinner even though I wasn't at all hungry. So I started with mussels cooked in a wine and cream sauce – quite delicious and more than sufficient but at the same time I ordered the main meal rack of lamb which was excellent in its way too but by now I was quite full so I picked at it in a desultory fashion and had to leave most of it. It was rather too late to have such a large meal unless I was to stay up half the night and this I had no intention of doing as I was to start work in the morning having to find the technical centre in the first place. I don't know how I had the cheek to attempt such a journey all the way from Airton on such skimpy information. It was sort of head in a northerly direction and turn left at the first polar bear!

Monday 20<sup>th</sup> April 1987

When I awakened in the morning and glanced out of my porthole I was astounded at what I saw. I wondered what all the crunching, cracking, creaking, sliding, slipping, slithering noise was

– and now I knew. We were ploughing and cleaving through packed ice. There were huge blocks of it, large ice floes and as far as the eye could see nothing but ice apart from the little islands of the archipelagos. Goodness me! There was enough ice to fill all the dives, all the bars, all the clip joints and all the cocktail lounges in the whole wide world from the beginning of time to eternity *and still have lots over for cold storage never mind cold turkey!* We've been ploughing through this stuff like a hot knife through butter all the way from Stockholm. What vegetation there was on the islands, trees etc. looked so utterly forlorn and dejected, cold miserable and depressed. I felt truly sorry for them. How anything can survive that sort of cold I just do not know and yet today everything is full of the joys of spring – buds are budding, birds are singing even the grass is turning green but more of that later because at this point I'm still on the "Wellamo" and on my way to breakfast which I had by a large panoramic window in the aft of the boat – all the better to watch the scenery and the ice being cleaved through by the boat.

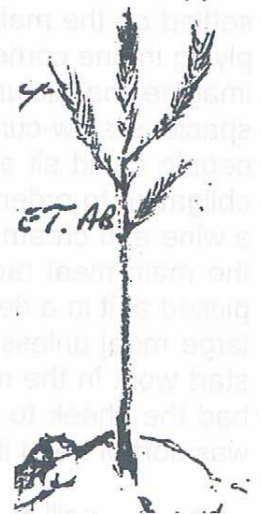
It was a glorious day a bright blue sky and brilliant sunshine and I was soon through customs and immigration control. Finally I was on the last leg of my epic journey. Just head north they said but which way is north? You know how confusing it is in dockland, full of cranes, jibs, railway lines and cargo containers and not a sign in English. Honestly, Karen when I first encountered the Finnish language the first thought that occurred to me was I've landed on a turkey farm, it's an impossible language and all gobbledegook to me. Even today, nearly two months later I'm still none the wiser. I can say thank you, good morning and good evening and that's it. It's full of double vowels and double consonants, there are no prepositions so the word itself changes each time you use a different preposition. i.e. to Stockholm is one word, from Stockholm is another word and in Stockholm yet another word so you see how difficult it is. There are also no articles and there is only one third person singular i.e. both man and woman is "he" which means no distinction between men and women – that's sex equality taken to the extreme! Anyway, after a few enquiries I was once more heading in the right direction which wasn't really difficult as there are not that many roads here. So there I was nice and cosy in the car with the sun overhead feeling pleased with myself because the roads were dry and snow free although the surrounding countryside was deep in snow. But when I stepped out at a gas station and got the full blast of the north wind it dawned on me that winter still retained an icy grip over here – not so much a grip, more a stranglehold!

1<sup>st</sup> May 1987 Friday

I observed whilst driving on the road that the Finns either through economic necessity or an inordinate regard for the environment, unlike their Swedish or American counterparts who use coloured poles to mark the roads in deep snow conditions; use instead thin fir branches stripped to their tips except for three or four branches at the ends (see sketch) so that under frosty conditions they seem to glow and are very decorative blending well with the surrounding countryside. Finally I reached journey's end without mishap arriving at OY-SAAB-VALMET-AB about 10am on March 4<sup>th</sup> my birthday.

Although SAAB's have been manufacturing cars here for the last ten years the design centre is new; in fact the official opening didn't occur until March 31<sup>st</sup> when we were all given a little exotic vase designed by the famous Finnish architect for the Paris world fair of 1936. This Alvar Aalto must have been a pretty smart cookie as it looks ultra modern today so 50 years ago it must have been a cultural shock. It will be a nice souvenir of SAAB.

At the time of my arrival there were only the five of us all from England and strange to relate I was acquainted with all of them. There was Geoff whom you've met, then there's Howard and Clive and I'd met them in America and lastly there is Ray who I've not seen for about eighteen years but had worked with during my first time in Sweden. Now we've been joined by two more designers both of whom I've worked with before. Dave I worked with at Porsche and Terry, an Australian I worked with in



America. It only means one thing Karen – I've been in this game too long I'm beginning to know everybody on the circuit.

How can I describe Uusikaupunki to you? The best way I think is how an American described Toledo to me, he said and I quote "I was in Toledo a week one day!!" Well Uusikaupunki is like that only more so besides I would say that Toledo is quite a bustling, thriving city compared to Uusikaupunki. What more can I say. The town is really quite small with about 14,000 inhabitants and is centred around the market square as are all the towns in Finland even the large ones. So we have a market square, an active church, two supermarkets, one cinema – a wooden building dating back about a hundred years – and opens twice a week usually on Tuesdays and Sundays with the performances at 7pm and 9pm. The movies are pretty recent and when they showed "Platoon" they ran it for four consecutive days!! There is one disco-restaurant-bar called the "Kirsten" mainly frequented by the young students. One other reasonable restaurant and the hotel a little way out of town. There are no fashionable shops at all and with the usual services, Post office and telephones, police station and hospital just about sums the place up – it's a small town with a small-town atmosphere where everyone knows everybody's business. The streets are similar to the American block system (see map) or perhaps the American system derives from Finland – who knows. Most of the main streets are paved but the minor side streets are just dirt roads. Rantakatu is paved as it's the main harbour street and I've marked with a circle my apartment number 9. Incidentally it's a wonder your letter ever got to me as you omitted to write the apartment number. So you see what kind of town it is – they even know where I live.

By referring to the map you'll see that I live opposite a small park which affords a pleasant view from my window. All the green bits are either parks or woods and forests and beyond the small park lies the woods with the cross-country ski tracks which I attempted late in the season without success as the tracks were very icy at this stage and my boots didn't fit the skis. The skis I think we bought together in a wild fit of enthusiasm and they have a little ridge that fits into a slot in the boots. Well I had brought the boots I had purchased in Sweden so consequently as you can imagine I was unable to really get my boot right down on the ski and therefore I fell over more times than I care to mention but I did enjoy walking the paths and across the sea to the nearest islands.

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1987

I think I've babbled on long enough for this letter so I'm going to reply briefly to your letter and relate to you an escapade in my winter's tale that compares with all the thrills of downhill skiing and all the excitement of white water rafting in Virginia and "Escapade" says it all so succinctly for its definition in the Oxford dictionary is :- piece of irresponsible or unorthodox conduct.

When Cliff arrived during my first weekend it was really cold. We were experiencing temperatures of -23°C so just for something to do I took him down to the seafront as I wanted to discover the place for myself too. I noticed cars driving on the open sea. Wow! I wanted to get some of this action but you can't drive off the seafront as the sea even when frozen lies some five feet or so below the harbour. Well I suppose the Finns go on these roads as unconcernedly as Stirling Heighters go to "Farmer Jack's" and it's even shown on the maps as special winter roads. But for me, it would be such a thrill it was so unorthodox that the imagination wouldn't accept it. Finally we found what we were seeking, a small ramp leading on to the frozen sea and down this we proceeded and soon found ourselves driving along a crude road marked in the same way as any other road with the little fir branches. It seems as though you can drive forever right into the horizon. We drove for about three or four miles with my heart in my mouth then we decided to return but I was determined to do it again. The opportunity presented itself the following weekend so armed with my faithful camera and a pretty full tank (there are no gas stations on this journey!) I set off towards sunset as I was resolved to get some dramatic shots. Once more I sought the ramp and having found it drove down to the ice road which appeared to head due west as it ran straight towards the setting sun.

I can't begin to tell you how exhilarating and exciting I found the experience like an African or Indian who sees his first fall of snow or perhaps an Eskimo catching his first glimpse of the Sahara – and I wasn't even out of the confines of the harbour yet. I stopped once to take a shot of a buoy against a background of jibs and cranes and then some distance further when I saw a cross-country skier deep in conversation with an ice fisherman with his drill stuck in the ice. You know I'm always after mood and light in my photos and here presented an ideal subject. I stopped the car and approached them as they were some distance away to ask if I could photograph them. They readily agreed and I've enclosed the result. It's surprising to see how small a hole he was fishing out of – no more than six inches in diameter. I can honestly say now that I too have walked upon the sea all be it a frozen one! However I wanted to drive way out into the wilds – to the back of the beyond so without hesitating I got back into the car and was on my way once more always heading into the setting sun. Well that's the way the road was running although I did go off road on several occasions I made it a point never to lose sight of it because it wouldn't pay to get lost out here. It was so warm and cosy in the car I felt as if cocooned or in a space capsule and other than the hiss of tyres on ice not another sound to be heard.

By now I had calmed down somewhat and really beginning to enjoy the scenery, Except when I came across great cracks and fissures in the ice then it was heart in the mouth syndrome and all I could do to muster enough courage to direct the car over them although in reality it was probably as safe as houses as the ice was perhaps two to three feet thick. Thus I continued for twenty miles or so until I considered the light was right to take my photos. I found what I thought would make a good shot and alighted from the car.

There is a certain time round about sunset when the very air itself is still and so I found it when I ventured forth from the car. The silence was absolute and total I felt both alone and lonely – in the heart of a frozen sea bathed in an ethereal pink glow with the setting sun just dipping between a pair of islands and snow dust swirling around my ankles. It was the most dreamlike and yet fully awake happening of my life. The moment was a very poignant one for me and shall ever be engraved in my mind as I felt the hairs in the nape of my neck stand on end. I felt as though I was the last man on earth standing in this frozen waste – wherever I looked nothing but ice and snow. I felt as if I had just emerged from an atomic shelter into a nuclear winter for this must be the way it will be but it was the silence that got to me it was so utterly complete and impregnable it was frightening. I wandered aimlessly around taking random shots as the light was changing constantly until I found myself up against another buoy and then another thought knocked me flat. Here was I standing against a buoy which would mark a busy sea lane under normal circumstances and the water below my feet would be fathoms deep. After I had soaked up enough atmosphere and beginning to feel chilled I returned to the car when the final and most scary thought occurred to me – "what if the car wouldn't start". One would never dream of such a thought so the car wouldn't start in a civilized community it would be easy right? But here in the middle of nowhere and completely out of touch with civilization it was a different matter. There were no mobile phones in those days. It's like walking a plank placed on the ground no problem, but place the same plank over a deep chasm and ones legs would turn to jelly – so it was with me too frightened to turn the ignition key for fear of the consequences. Well I wouldn't be here writing this letter if I didn't and thus did I drive back in the twilight and from the "twilight zone". If you still remember the theme song now is the time to whistle a few bars for me. Hey, one gets to think a lot out there in the frozen north.

When I related my tale back at the office the Finns thought I was mad to go on that road without winter tyres. Oh well they say ignorance is bliss and it was certainly a blissful experience. I don't think I would ever have made it in the Chevette.

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May 1987

I really didn't intend to write as much as I did about the ice road incident but I was inspired and got carried away. Now I'll answer your letter briefly and leave my skiing holiday for a future letter.

I shall certainly try and visit Russia. It's quite simple as it will be all organized. You can make a three day trip to Leningrad which is just over the border you can travel there either by ferry or bus. I've not decided yet but will probably go there at the end of June.

I'm not that far from Helsinki, about three hours and I shall spend at least a weekend there *sometime soon*. *Most people here speak Finnish and I haven't heard anyone speaking Swedish* although on the west coast most places have both Finnish and Swedish names, i.e. Uusikaupunki which means New Town in Swedish is Ny-Stad. Turku is Åbo and so on which only makes things even more confusing. Yes, Stockholm is a beautiful city and I've some really nice slides I had taken there during my last visit. The architecture is very similar to Paris as the Swedes at that time were both culturally and historically attached to France, French being the official language of the Swedish court, so it can be said that Stockholm is like Paris with canals. Whilst we are on the subject – I like your use of the word "tryst", it sounds so romantic!

How would you like to split a week between Stockholm and Helsinki. If you flew to Stockholm I could be there to meet you. We'll have a few days to sightsee and then take the Silja Line to Helsinki – spend a few days there then put us and the car on a train up north to Lapland and just spend as many days as you wish just touring the most beautiful places, and taking some easy walks. They say Lapland is at its most beautiful at that time, mid-September when I shall have completed this contract and there won't be any mosquitoes then. Of course this is only a suggestion but if you prefer the Greek islands or Portugal or a tour of the Loire Valley in France let me know what you would like best then I'll do my ablest to accommodate you. I'll need to be back in England for mid-October so I can attend Adrian's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

I've enclosed prints off slides of some of my adventures and there is a brief description on the back of each print. Also enclosed is a map of Uusikaupunki and an aerial view of same and on the back is a painting by an artist Henry Davantti whose exhibition Geoff and I visited so now you know how small the town is when we make the news because of it. The artist is standing next to me and Geoff is talking to an American exchange student. Do you see what I mean about the language – it's really something isn't it?

Uusikaupunki isn't quite looking how the brochure depicts but I guess that it was taken in high Summer and now the trees are not in leaf yet and the daffodils are not out.