

Finland

Viljami Kankaanpää-Kukkonen interviewed **Caj Bremer**

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Caj Bremer's home in Sipoo, at the kitchen table.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Ok, so I will tell this recorder that we are here with photojournalist and anthropologist Caj Bremer, and I am Viljami Kankaanpää-Kukkonen, PhD student and anthropologist at the University of Helsinki. Caj, let's start with your childhood. Could you describe what your childhood was like?

Bremer: I have to divide it into two parts. I was 10 when the Winter War [between Finland and the Soviet Union between Nov 1939 and March 1940]¹ began. I was in school, and the shock it caused erased almost all of my childhood memories from before the age of 10. I've seen pictures and heard the stories, and I remember a little something, but when I tell my children my experiences so that they can remember things from the ages of 2 to 4, all of this is gone from me, and it's sad. It's not scientifically proven that this is the case, but I can't really explain it in any other way. So, before the war my childhood was probably normal, nothing dramatic happened. I spent the summer here, I went to Kulosaari Elementary School, and I probably had a normal family life. I have five sisters, all older than me. It is very difficult for me to say anything about my life before the age of 10, but I can remember things after that clearly. By that time of course, I was no longer a child.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Yes, yes.

Bremer: I'm annoyed that I can't remember more. Sometimes photos bring back to me some minor memories or something like that, but I can't say clearly what happened when I was seven, eight or nine. No, it's gone.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Do you remember when the war started?

Bremer: Yes, I remember that. When the Winter War started, I was in school and suddenly there were loud bangs and windows were shaking, and one boy said that 'Now the war had started'.

We were aware that the situation was difficult, and that anything could happen.

The teacher said 'Don't say that!' and then the sirens started ringing. Then everyone knew the bombs had been dropped somewhere. Then this teacher got nervous, and told us to go out into the woods and lie down on the moss. He was afraid it was a gas bomb.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Ah, ok!

¹ The Winter War was a war between the Soviet Union and Finland. It began with a Soviet invasion of Finland on 30 November 1939, three months after the outbreak of World War II, and ended three and a half months later with the Moscow Peace Treaty on 13 March 1940.

Bremer: Was it called a gas bomb?

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Yes.

Bremer: Must have been familiar to those who lived during the First World War.

I didn't spend many minutes in the woods. After a few minutes, I got up and ran home. We lived next to Kruunuvuorenselkä [bay area in the outer parts of Helsinki]. It was from there that I saw the bombs dropped on Helsinki.

Then, within a couple of days we were evacuated from Helsinki, and we came here to live.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: What did your parents do before and after the war?

Bremer: My mother was a housewife and my father worked at the bank. Not as a bank manager, but the treasurer. But only my mother and two sisters moved here. All my other siblings were engaged elsewhere, they were nurses etc. Here we lived for three or four months, for the duration of the war. Then we moved back and went back to school. This was followed by years that were pretty typical for a teenager.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: And then the Continuation War [1941 – 1944]² came pretty soon after that?

Bremer: Yes, and then there was the Continuation War. It lasted for most of the time I was at school. It ended in '45 (sic) and in '48 I left school.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: What did you dream of when you were a kid? From the age of 10, for example? Did you think about what you would do and where you would go?

Bremer: It was never clear to me what I was going to do, but I was very interested in astronomy.

I read a lot of books, and if I ever found an article in a newspaper about the latest discoveries, I read it right away. At the same time, I knew that I wouldn't become an astronomer. It was just a hobby and I did not pursue it as a profession. I was 13 to 14 years old then. I had no special skills and I was not a genius at school. I was happy just to graduate.

We had a group of friends – quite a gang – in Kulosaari [Helsinki suburb]. We were hanging out together and doing all kinds of things. It was nice having friends and being accepted in the gang. After graduation, we met quite often and had been meeting with each other until recent years.

I have lots of nice memories and friends from school. I rather enjoyed being outside my home.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: I understand that your native language is Swedish. Did this mean that you spoke Finnish or Swedish in your group of friends?

Bremer: Swedish! There were friends who spoke Finnish, too.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Ok, ok.

² Fought by Finland and Nazi Germany, as co-belligerents, against the Soviet Union from 1941 to 1944, during World War II.

Bremer: Sometimes we would have a terrible fight - a Finnish gang against a Swedish gang. We played pranks on each other.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: And was this ---

Bremer: Finnish was a foreign language to me when I started school, because throughout my childhood in Kulosaari only Swedish was spoken, and my mother's and father's friends were all Swedish speakers. Finnish was very difficult for me at school, and continues to be so. When I was working at *Viikkosanomat* newspaper, they said that I speak the language of Bremer. My language was kind of a mix of things, but it didn't bother me. Of course, it bothers me now when I can't find the right words, but I can't do anything to fix it.

I had to learn to speak Finnish. I spent most of my career working at Finnish newspapers. But everyone immediately knows that I am a Finnish-Swede when they hear me speaking.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Apparently you went to high school?

Bremer: You mean when I went? The school had nine grades.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Yes, yes.

Bremer: I ended school in eighth grade because I went into the army.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Did you return to high school after the army?

Bremer: Yes, and while I was in ninth grade, I looked back on the eighth grade. It was then that I realized that graduating from high school was useless for me, because I was not going to apply to colleges. My parents were a little worried about what Caj was going to do with his life, while I was more interested in the blonde girl I met during a day off from military service. I married her.

I've talked about this many times, but during the time my family was worried about my career, my brother-in-law once said to me: 'Caj, I know this photographer in Helsinki. Have you ever thought about becoming a photographer?'. He could have known any type of professional; a butcher, a fashion designer – and I wouldn't have been very interested. I had that little box camera in my teens, and I took some amateur pictures with it. So, just by pure coincidence, my brother-in-law suggested working for a photographer, and I tried it, and I didn't feel comfortable with that job. I didn't feel comfortable working at the next place either, as an industrial photographer's assistant. If I had continued with that job, I would not have become a photographer. I didn't enjoy studio work.

Then it just so happened that the *Huvudstadbladet* called me and asked if I'd be a photographer for them. The first time I set foot in their office, I knew right away that this was my place.

But it was quite some time before this happened.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Do you know if the people at *Huvudstadbladet* had seen any of your photos?

Bremer: It's a bit weird, I don't know where they found out about me, because my photos weren't published anywhere. I was maybe a member of a (still existing) camera club called *Amatörfotografklubben*.

Maybe they had seen something through that. May also be due to the fact that I am a Finnish-Swede. They needed and wanted a young guy. The previous worker was an old grandpa who had been there for a long time. These journalists were nice young people and they trained me not only to be a photographer, but to be a journalist too. They kind of took me under their wing. I am eternally grateful to them, because this was my thing.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Were your parents happy when you found such a career?

Bremer: Well, I don't know. I can imagine that they thought I would stand somewhere in Kaisaniemi and photograph people under the hood. But that wasn't important to me, the main thing was what I wanted. My wife and I got married quite young and had children, and by then I was already a photographer at the newspaper.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Rewinding a bit, did you have a close relationship with your grandparents? What did your grandparents do?

Bremer: I never met them.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: None of them?

Bremer: No. When I was born, they were already dead. I was the last of six children. Except my grandmother from the father's side – she was still alive. The man who built this house where we are now, his sister was my grandmother. But she was very old when I was a teenager, a little demented. Is that what you meant?

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: I meant grandparents.

Bremer: There was no one else besides this grandmother on my father's side. I don't remember the context, but I've heard a story that once when I was very young, I went to my grandmother's room to ask: 'Does grandma like me?' And she said: 'Yes my son, yes.' – 'Can I get a one-mark coin?' It was a lot of money then. I sat in her lap and asked for this money. The same as asking if I can get one euro.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: May I ask if your father was at war?

Bremer: No, he was in the White Guard on the home front [The White Guard or Civil Guard was a voluntary militia that emerged victorious over the socialist Red Guards as a part of the Whites in the Finnish Civil War of 1918]. My sisters were nurses.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: All of them?

Bremer: Not all of them. Two or three, actually. If the war had lasted, I would have been on some sort of assignment myself, but I was spared since I was only 16 or 17. However, I was at the home front in Helsinki when it was bombed in '44. I was a messenger who ran from one fire to another. There were no cell phones then, and the command post needed to know what was going on, so I ran there as a messenger and told them where there was fire. It was pretty violent. Bombs dropped; grenade fragments flew from the anti-aircraft weapons. In those cases, you just had to run. Maybe I was a bit of a fatalist - sometimes I thought I was hit and that I couldn't do anything about it. If I heard a bad sound, I threw myself into the ditch. It was a bit like a war front, but the home front, and I had a somewhat similar experience there. Of course, I was happy that I was too young for the war front.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: What it was like to be someone who was barely a grown-up in post-war Finland? Were there hopeful feelings about the future in Finland at that time?

Bremer: Yes, there was, even though the old films tell the truth about it being a quite difficult time in Finland - with respect to food, clothing and everything. But I did not notice it so much as a teenager. I had clothes, and my mother made some food, but I wouldn't have wanted to be a housewife or taking care of a family back then, and it wouldn't have been my thing. It was a difficult time at the end of the 40s. You could really see it. I didn't travel, but my sisters went to Sweden sometimes, and they told me what was there and what it was like there, and it sounded amazing. I just dreamed of getting French bread, splitting it, and putting butter and Emmental cheese on it. Food and something sweet most of all. We didn't get candy, just got some juice powder instead. Then, after the 50s, better times came, and the standard of living rose. But yes, in retrospect, times were tough for everyone before that. And as a teenager, I didn't think so much about the political situation, but if I was a little older then, of course, I would have been a little bit scared of where we were going in Finland, and worried about when Finland would become like other countries. But in the end, Finland did quite well.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Did you have a feeling that Finland was alone in the world, or that Finland was somehow part of Europe?

Bremer: I can't answer that because I didn't think about things like that back then. Of course, we knew that Finland was really close to the Soviet Union, and if something were to happen, I doubt that we would have received any help.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Yes.

Bremer: But, we all honoured those who made this happen, who made this tolerable peace possible, as well as those who fought in the war. Of course, it was hard that our friends were gone, had died in the war, had fallen, but Finland still remained intact. But it is very clear that what I now think about this [time] is largely based on what I have heard [since]. However, if I consider how I thought back then, about going to school and everything else, then it was quite fun. The gang – although there was a shortage of everything, we still came up with all kinds of things to do and that left me with very nice memories. There were so many friends. At home there was some concern about me for some reason. But it was ok. We didn't commit any crimes - we only played some small pranks.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: When your sisters were in Sweden, did you also feel like you wanted to get out and explore the world?

Bremer: No, I didn't get to Sweden until I was working.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Did you work for *Huvudstadsbladet* during that time or before?

Bremer: I was working for *Huvudstadsbladet*, and I went to Stockholm for the first time then to study photography.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: While you were working?

Bremer: Yes, at the same time. There was nothing like that in Finland, so I took a little longer vacation than usual and went to Sweden to learn photography. I wanted to learn how to use

a small camera and film [the film Bremer is referring to is 35mm. He was one of the pioneers of this type of photography in Finland]. I brought this training with me back to Finland. But I was already a father and a professional photographer.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: When did you start doing jobs abroad?

Bremer: It wasn't until I was a photographer at *Viikkosanomat* [Weekly Finnish news magazine published between 1922 and 1975]. Then I got jobs both in Finland and abroad. And it was all new to me. I hadn't seen places in Finland, I didn't know anything about Finland. In '57 I was in Lapland for the first time. In '57 and '58 I travelled to Germany and Europe. Everything was new. I tried to get used to it. After all, I quickly noticed that we had so many of the same things in Finland as elsewhere – only the language was different.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: I would like to ask you some questions about politics...

Bremer: I can tell you that I knew nothing about politics, other than what was written in the newspapers. My mother and father were not political. I don't know if they were even part of the *Folkpartiet* [liberal-centrist political party in Finland representing the Swedish-speaking population]. Politics was not talked about at home. But as it is nowadays, in the gang we listened to music, sang together, and very rarely talked about foreign politics or anything like that, beyond saying once in a while that the Russians were bad. That came much later. My children are more involved in politics than I. When I worked, I felt pretty liberal. What I noticed when I was travelling in those countries on the other side of the Iron Curtain was that people in those countries wanted to expel the Russkies People from Czechoslovakia and Hungary, for example.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Were your kids involved in any social movements of the 60s and 70s?

Bremer: At least two of them were quite radicalized, but then it passed! I have a picture of Nalle Wahlroos [One of Finland's richest men, Wahlroos has chaired Nordea's board for eight years.], where he is standing and shouting. It's a picture of him from an earlier time, when he was still a Stalinist.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Did you photograph your children when they...

Bremer: They did not become Wahlrooses, but... It was probably after the war when people were politically more to the left, and against the USA. And so was I. I didn't agree with what they were doing in Vietnam, but it was so far away and I wasn't sent there to take photographs. I was not interested in taking photographs of wars anyway, nor was I interested in going to disaster areas. It's part of the profession, so I sometimes went, though I didn't feel comfortable in any way. I wanted to get home quickly.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: As a journalist and photographer, did you feel that you had – political is the wrong word – a societal role?

Bremer: I was really interested in people, more than the environment, but people in their own environment, people and their thoughts. I was probably quite humane. I wanted to use photographs to relate to others what I was experiencing in different places. I had no trouble getting in touch with people – it was very easy for me. I got them to open up, and I myself was able to talk. It was just as important to me as when I got to take a photo of them. I liked

those assignments both home and abroad where people were in their own environments, with their happiness and their sorrows, and everything between.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: When you started travelling abroad, did the things you see there affect your thinking, or your political ideas?

Bremer: No, not in that way. In '59 I was in Turkey for the first time - it was very exotic to me. Turkey was quite different then. It was my first experience in an Eastern country. But I didn't even think about their politics. Even though I knew something about politics in general, I didn't travel there so I could sit and talk about politics. Someone probably did. I know you're interested in politics, but it didn't interest me when I was young, and it doesn't interest me now.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: You are interested in people.

Bremer: Yes, of course, I follow what's happening. I have never been interested in the politics of photography. I have been asked many times if I would be a member of this and that, and I would answer no, I don't want to sit at any conference and chat. Those people already exist, and that's enough.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Could you say that - I don't want to put words in your mouth, but could you say that you were more interested in politicians as people than as politicians?

Bremer: Can you repeat what you mean?

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: I mean, when you took photos of politicians, you were more interested in them as people than as politicians?

Bremer: No, no, no, even though I had photographed politicians many times, I never thought about what they did in their personal lives, you understand?

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Ah ok, ok.

Bremer: They would perform some of their duties for example, and I photographed them doing those duties. I didn't ever think that I'd get to know them somewhat better. I mean, I often photographed [Urho] Kekkonen [the longest-standing President of Finland and is among the most important political figures in modern Finland] but we never had any sort of relationship. I was a newspaper photographer and he was president. It wasn't like we ever went to the sauna together or anything like that. He knew who I was, and I knew who he was, and I knew what I could do, and he did what he knew he could do. Luckily, I didn't have to work in parliament very often. It was so boring.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: What were your favourite gigs?

Bremer: Well, maybe those involving a family that lived in the countryside - in Pihtipudas, for example. Or in Finland or elsewhere, but just ordinary people. Of course, politicians are ordinary people too, but they are connected with politics.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Do you remember when there was talk of Finland joining the European Union?

Bremer: Yes, I remember. Like so many others, I thought that finally, it would be nice to have Finland integrated into Europe. I supported that idea, not as a photographer or in political terms, but more as a regular soldier, part of the home front.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: And then it came true. Do you remember how long it took?

Bremer: No, no, no, I don't exactly remember what happened. Like I said, it wasn't my area. I didn't go to political meetings, those were for other photographers to take pictures of. I wanted to portray life in a completely different way. Of course, I was not blind. I had thoughts and feelings, and I thought that joining [the EU] was a good thing for Finland.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Did it affect your life in any way?

Bremer: No, not really. It affected my life only to the extent that it affected Finnish life in general. I wasn't a True Finn [Finnish right-wing populist political party].

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: But did you feel that you could go anywhere before there was the free movement that came with EU membership??

Bremer: Yes of course. All of this happened when I was already retired. Surely the free movement made my travelling easier too, but I was never really interested in these things. If I was involved in a discussion where this was a topic, then of course I would defend it. There were other similar things before the EU, such as EFTA and so on, but I always thought it would be great if Finland was involved in such things with other neutral countries.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Here comes a slightly more philosophical question: Have you always had an optimistic or hopeful outlook with respect to the future, or to your children's future?

Bremer: Well, I have lived a pretty happy life. My family has always stayed together. And I have children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and we have a lot of contact with each other. In that way, my family life has been pretty nice. It's a fact that at this age my friends around me will be dead soon, or are already gone, and that's sad, but that's what life is like. That's being realistic. Life ends sometimes, sooner or later.

I have never stopped or forgotten about taking photos, even when I retired. I have photographed all over the world. And I've always done it all by myself. I have always had a workstation at home, even when I was working at a newspaper.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Do you have the feeling that your home has always been here?

Bremer: Yes, I have my whole archive here at home, and I don't know what the fate of that archive is going to be, but it's been fun to create different projects from it. I have about 10,000 photographs. These are the photographs I have taken for newspapers. It's quite a number.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: It really is.

Bremer: There's all kinds of photographs - lowbrow ones too.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Nowadays, almost anyone can take 10,000 pictures. They can be taken so easily! There is no guarantee of quality though.

Bremer: Yes, when I was photographing actively, they weren't digital. It really had to be considered carefully before pressing the button.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Were there ever moments that the future looked darker, or more difficult, on a personal level or in the world?

Bremer: The future? Do you mean now or then?

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Then or...

Bremer: No, no, no, I haven't felt like that. I have always been pretty healthy. Last summer I was in Savonlinna, at a doctors conference, where the theme was health and art, and I made a speech in which I said that I have lived a long time and that I am still in good shape, and that I believe it's due to the fact that I have always enjoyed my work. My work has kept me healthy and lively. I am constantly thinking about photography. Those who don't like their job get sick easier and kick the bucket at a younger age. So in that sense, I'm pretty happy. I'm happy that my brother-in-law knew this photographer. I don't know what I would have become without him. I've never thought about this too much, but if he had told me that he knew a butcher, I doubt I'd have worked anywhere.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: So did it come as a surprise to you that you were such a good photographer?

Bremer: Well... Many already know from a young age what they want to be when they grow up. If I had been asked as a kid what I wanted to be, I would have answered that I wanted to be the tram driver. Or a fireman. That would be a pretty typical answer. Not a policeman, however! I have often thought about what I would have become without my apprenticeship, but so does everyone else. When you get old you start to think.

If I started researching ants [Ants are one of Kankaanpää-Kukkonen's research subjects.], I'm sure that I will be happy, I am almost certain.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Since I was seven years-old, I was always interested in nature and I feel I always wanted to be a biologist and researcher.

Bremer: Now I'll make some coffee!

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Ok!

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: So, before people climbed Mount Everest a couple of times a year or something like that, nowadays it's hard to get there because there's a queue.

Bremer: Yes! Yes!

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: People queue up to hike it.

Bremer: Yes, it is weird.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: So, why go.

Bremer: It's an adventure for sure. I mean, I wouldn't want to stand in that queue. I'm not adventurous in the sense that I would just go anywhere. I've met a lot of war photographers, and they would do anything just to get that feeling. They could even sit on top of a tank gun and from that position take photographs if it was allowed. And the reason why they behave like that is they just want to feel like heroes. They are not affected by conflicts. It's not my

intention to generalize, but for most of them, it's all the same where they are, as long as it's exciting. They are a little bit like mercenaries.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Have you always had the attitude that with every job you accept, you'll do it as best as you can? Have you ever had the feeling that you couldn't or didn't want to accept some assignment abroad?

Bremer: Well, yes. When I was on the Golan Heights, where Egypt, Syria and Israel fought, I didn't feel comfortable, but since I had accepted the assignment in the first place, I just had to deal with it.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Yes.

Bremer: Then once there was a situation with grenades, and everybody had to get down, so I protected my camera. That was the moment I thought to myself: What the hell am I doing here? It's because of Aatos Erkko [long-time owner of Helsingin Sanomat]. Then I asked the newspaper 'What the hell, why I am here?! Soon I'll be wounded by the damn grenade fragments. Or the whole grenade will hit my head.' Because I wasn't there defending anything. I was a total outsider. Why the hell did they have to shoot right where I am?

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Have you been photographing in Europe when something big has happened?

Bremer: What's big?

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Well, something you think is big.

Bremer: You mean politics?

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Not necessarily politics, but...

Bremer: Well, Erkko and the newspaper were interested in the royalty, so I've been to the big weddings. And at those too, I have been asking 'What the hell am I doing here?' But those jobs also had to be done. In certain groups, those are big things, like they are in Sweden, for example.

I haven't been to any G7 or G8 meetings. Those are boring. When Queen Elisabeth first visited Germany after the wars, there were at least 800 journalists and I was there too as a photographer. Or when the Pope first visited Jordan and Israel, it was a huge media event. I had to represent a newspaper that nobody knew anything about or even knew existed. All the big newspapers in the world and their photographers got all the doors open, but we were probably the last on the list. This meant that we had to compete with them. I was ok there, but it's a fact that if one newspaper has 15 or 20 photographers placed all around to photograph, compared to that, one person can't do much at all. I was happy with what I got, and it was nice to watch how the media works at mass events as well as those self-important people, too.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Have you ever watched TV or viewed photography and thought 'I would like to be there too taking pictures.'

Bremer: No.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: No? Ok!

Bremer: Just the opposite. It's a damn good that I'm not.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: So that someone else does it for you?

Bremer: Yes, yes, it's good that I'm like 'I'm a pensioner, someone else can do it!' I'm just kidding. Well, actually, if any topic interests me, or if some group finds some new data, or if I see landscapes I've never seen before, then of course I feel jealous. When you asked if I had photographed ants or anything like that – when I see today's nature programs by the BBC for example, they are incredible. The photographic technique has progressed so much, and secondly, so much time is devoted just to capture that one particular moment. They might spend a year trying to capture a specific shot. Those behind-the-scenes - documentaries are interesting too.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: I remember one just like this, it was Planet Earth or something similar, the photographer had probably spent two months in the Afghanistan border area.

Bremer: Yes!

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: And there was this, I think, a snow leopard.

Bremer: Oh, ok!

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: And he waited two months for it to show up, and viewers could see it for two minutes.

Bremer: Yes!

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: I was trying to relate to this, and I couldn't. If I were that photographer, my hands would have been shaking so much.

Bremer: Yes, finally!

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: I would just go crazy.

Bremer: Yes, yes. If I had been interested in photographing a beehive, of course I would have photographed it, but it requires equipment designed for that kind of use. A digital camera wouldn't work.

Probably in many documentaries, the animals live in the laboratory and in that way can be filmed easier, insects especially. I watch a lot of them. And the macro photography is so incredible too. Once some Frenchman made a macro film about small things. In that film he explained what is happening beneath your feet. Very interesting. I've probably found six ticks on me. It's not nice! I wouldn't like to photograph a tick's life!

(Kankaanpää-Kukkonen talks about his career as a biologist and anthropologist. There's also talk about anthropology, beekeeping and traveling merchants.)

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Regarding your exhibitions, have you had many abroad?

Bremer: No, I mean some, but not many. I'm a really bad salesman. I don't know how to sell my own photographs. Even my son said I could never be a freelancer, because I can't sell myself. I haven't sent my photographs all over the world [as] I feel that they are somehow so connected to Finland.

Now there will be an exhibition called 'Finnish everyday life' at the Finnish Museum of Photography, and later at the Museum of Sanomat on Rikhardinkatu, my photography taken abroad will be featured. It has been featured less frequently. They have that kind of journalistic touch. There's going to be some text accompanying the photos. People here like them because they were taken here in Finland. No one is interested in them abroad. We may be interested in Bresson's French photographs, but in France, no one wants to go see Caj Bremer's photographs.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Do you have the feeling that people are not interested in Finland, or that Finland should be portrayed in some particular way, or should it be marketed in some specific way?

Bremer: No but – we have these wonderful views. Nowadays with digital technology you can take whatever picture you want if you know how to use it. There is also a lot of money spent on exhibitions abroad, or maybe they have something special to show.

My exhibition is done on a very small budget. I also received a grant from the Cultural Foundation to make this happen. Yes, photography and photographs cost something. I took them all here and washed the photographs in the Gulf of Finland.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: I would like to ask one thing about your education: You told me earlier that you didn't attend university?

Bremer: Yes.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: If I understand correctly, you later ended up, at an older age, teaching at the university? Or did I misunderstand something?

Bremer: You mean, I taught there?

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Yes.

Bremer: Yes, but I was not a regular employee.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Ah.

Bremer: And I wouldn't have wanted to be a regular teacher. Also, I probably wouldn't have been knowledgeable enough about photography to have been a teacher.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Ok.

Bremer: Because I know a lot about photography, but I haven't scientifically researched anything. Next Tuesday I was invited to Torkkeli High School to talk about myself. I realized that art is a big thing there.

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: My sister went to school there.

Bremer: You went to school there?

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: I didn't, but my sister did.

Bremer: Yes. There I'll explain who I am, talk about my life, show photographs etc. That I can do. That I've done in many places. I am quite a storyteller and it's always linked to these photos. And I know that when I start showing photographs, I command the auditorium, no

matter where it is and who is sitting there, they sit still and look. I like doing it, especially with these teenagers, as I was teenager when I started this career.

Are you satisfied?

Kankaanpää-Kukkonen: Yes, yes, very. Thank you very much!