

Finland

Elina Niemeläinen interviewed **Leena Oravilahti**

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Niemeläinen: Good evening from sunny Helsinki. My name is Elina Niemeläinen, and I am studying social science at the University of Tampere. Today I'll be interviewing Leena Oravilahti, who was born in 1935 in Joutseno. She studied languages and economics at the Helsinki School of Economics. Also, she had a long career as an interpreter.

Okay, let's start. Leena, how would you describe your childhood?

Oravilahti: My childhood was very rich and varied. It was unhappy, happy, exciting and scary at the same time, due to the conditions in Finland at the time.

I grew up in a family; My mother and father were very child-friendly, and there were a whole bunch of us kids. We were six children. Some were adopted and others were foster children. It was fun!

Niemeläinen: What was your home like?

Oravilahti: Our home was in a big house in Jääski. My father was a cantor and organist, and the house was his official residence. It was a big, two-storey building close to nature and the countryside, which I thought was a fun place to live in.

There was a lot of forest, and a funny tree grew in our yard. At first, the tree grew along the ground, then it rose, and we kids always climbed up it.

It was our toy horse, our tower, our watch tower - it was all kind of things.

There, in the municipality of Jääski, I started studying a little too, but not really that much. Our circumstances and life had changed.

Niemeläinen: How old you were when the things changed?

Oravilahti: I was about six years old, give or take. There was a war between Finland and the Soviet Union, and we lived very close to the border. Every day we heard planes in the sky, and at worst they dropped bombs, and we heard shooting and everything. Everyone would be worried for the safety of their families.

Father had to go to war and Mother stayed home with the kids.

Well, I have to correct something, our family was as big as I mentioned, but only many years later.

This was my early childhood home, and at that time it was possible for children of families living in the border areas to be sent to Sweden in order to flee the war.

I was so sick back then. I got some stomach disease, so my mother decided to do something. She was so afraid that I would die.

So she decided that me and my sister, who was three years older, would be sent to Sweden in order to flee the war.

Niemeläinen: What did it feel like going to Sweden?

Oravilahti: It was an exciting thing. I was so glad, it was so exciting and fun, and I jumped around and said 'We are going to Sweden now!'

Mother made us take the train that took us north and across the border, and then we arrived in Sweden.

My sister Lissu was so unhappy. She curled up in the corner of the train to cry.

She said: 'I want to go home, I miss Mom and Dad.' Then we arrived in Stockholm, where the doctor examined us, and then we were sent to families who had promised to take us in to live with them.

Niemeläinen: What was your family like in Sweden?

Oravilahti: My family was a primary school teacher, a middle-aged unmarried woman. Her name was Aunt Liisa.

I lived with her during that time. My sister Lissu ended up with a family where the parents were also teachers. They had two children – a boy and a girl – about the same age as my sister.

We lived close to each other - there was only the driveway between us - so we could see each other constantly.

Niemeläinen: Did you have certain dreams in your childhood, or things that you were particularly interested in?

Oravilahti: I loved playing in nature, climbing trees and rocks. And music, we listened to a lot of music. I loved music. The rhythm would take control. It made me wiggle my toes and I liked dancing since I was a little girl.

Niemeläinen: Did you dance at a later age? As a hobby?

Oravilahti: Yes, but it took many years. I think I was 12-13 years-old when a ballet school was established in Imatra, my hometown back then. I really wanted to go there.

Then I got a permission from my parents and I went there for a year and a half at least.

Eventually, for a variety of reasons, I stopped going there, but the joy and experiences of dancing are still with me.

Niemeläinen: Have they stayed with you your entire life?

Oravilahti: Yes. For example, during my studies; I was studying at the School of Economics and we had this program group led by a famous ballet dancer, Heikki Värtsi. He was studying at that school too. He had put together a group of very different types of people. There were dancers, actors, musicians, and I got to participate too. We had several shows, some of which were shown on television as 'training' programs, because television was such a new thing then.

We made a few shows there, but that happened later in life.

Music still fascinates me, and when I hear it, I like to dance. When the music is beautiful, it makes me want to move with it. It's probably because I'm so musically inclined.

Niemeläinen: What does home mean to you?

Oravilahti: Home means many things to me. Most of all, I think of my childhood home.

In the midst of terror, it was a refuge for me.

It means love but also discipline. It means that nature was a playground. We didn't really need any toys, because nature offered us everything we needed. Pine cones, rocks, sticks, berries, fruit - everything. With these we came up with many games. It was very inspiring.

Niemeläinen: Did you ever talk about the horrors of war in your home?

Oravilahti: Not really. Not about all of it. But we heard the shooting, bombs and planes above our home, so we knew that when there was shooting, people could get hurt and die.

The planes were really scary to me, and sometimes we even saw bombs being dropped.

After that, I was afraid of airplanes for a long time. I always went into the dark closet where I couldn't see or hear them.

Niemeläinen: Do you remember your first trip abroad after Sweden?

Oravilahti: Yes, I was about to say, that Sweden was my first trip abroad, but what was the second one? It was probably after my graduation that I travelled to England for a short while, to help a housewife with her household. It was called 'mother's help,' but nowadays it's called an 'au pair'.

So that was my next trip abroad, and it was so fun.

I ended up with a very interesting family. The father of the family had this 'porcelain factory,' or 'faience factory'" where beautiful objects of all kinds were made. And they lived in a beautiful, two-storey house - no, three-storey house - that was like a castle, with a tall tower in the centre.

The house was very fancy and the people there were very sophisticated and smart. The family's daughter was an engineer, one of the boys was a doctor, and the youngest... I can't remember what he studied, but there I learned a lot about England, as well as English culture and customs. It was a very educational time for me.

Niemeläinen: Definitely. Is there something specific about England that has left a mark on you?

Oravilahti: Well, we had a fun group of students there. There were organized courses for foreigners, who wanted to learn English.

We all went there. There were people from different countries: Germany, India, Finland, and Sweden, for example.

We had these fun parties and games, and did all kinds of things together. It made studying really meaningful. I was happy to go there, and I learned the language better this way too.

Niemeläinen: How about the time you were studying? Which is your most cherished memory from when school started?

Oravilahti: We had returned from Sweden to Imatra, Finland. We didn't have an apartment yet, so we got an apartment in Vuoksivirta, which was on an island named Varpasaari.

There was this British so-called lodge, but it was a beautiful villa with a glass veranda, and there were lots of things that were beautiful about it. For example, there was this showcase which featured a 15 kg stuffed pike - over a meter long - and we kids marvelled at that.

It was so nice to play there, and we got to sail on a boat. Yes, it was very nice place.

A funny memory from the elementary school I attended at that time is the following one;

The road was near where we lived, and the school was 500 meters across the road, so one time my teacher said that he would like to come visit us on the island, and that I could pick him up by boat.

The distance was short - only 100 meters at most from shore to shore - but there was quite a current.

Luckily, we were used to rowing, and of course there was an adult on that boat with me.

The funny part was that I was a little girl, and my teacher was a chubby man. Quite chubby, and when he was sitting there on the other side of that boat, with me as a rower, the oars barely reached the water due to his weight.

Niemeläinen: What were your school days like?

Oravilahti: Actually, the days were pretty fun. We rode our bikes from home to school.

This was only in grammar school, not during elementary school, as the school was so close.

The fact that I am left-handed made school difficult for me.

At that time, everyone had to write with their right hand, even lefties.

It traumatized me for a long time, and it became almost like a complex when I had to write on the chalkboard as the whole class watched. It bothered me for a long time.

At elementary school, you were allowed to write on the chalkboard with your left hand, but everyone in the class would still watch and criticize you.

Besides that, school was fun. It was nice to meet friends there, and we had fun doing everything together.

Niemeläinen: Did you have a favourite subject?

Oravilahti: I liked gymnastics. Maybe it was related to dance, so it became something dear to me.

Singing was also fun.

Niemeläinen: Which countries did you learn the most about in history and geography, or at school in general? Were some countries absent from your education, or did they cover a lot of Europe or other continents?

Oravilahti: It didn't happen at all in elementary school. We covered some countries in history class. Our teacher talked about stories, legends, all the great events involving Greece, Attila, Hannibal and all that stuff. And, of course, the kings.

When I was in high school, I found history lessons to be a really interesting, and geography too, of course. I loved maps. In your mind, you could travel anywhere on the map just by looking at all the exciting place names. In geography lessons, I learned about what was typical for a certain country and what one can see in that country.

For example, Switzerland has mountains and deep, beautiful lakes and stuff. Spain is warm and hot, and lots of fruit grows there. And people are very different from us; lively, communal, those sorts of things.

Niemeläinen: Have you had any particularly important teacher or role model in your life?

Oravilahti: Not exactly a role model, but gymnastics teacher Elise Närhi was a very nice person, and she taught us interesting skills in elementary school - or was it high school? Anyway, there was a big sports festival in Helsinki, and we started saving money for it.

As you know, we organized our own gymnastics group, and the teacher had this envelope in which we collected money. Everyone brought some so that when we went to Helsinki, we would have our own money for the trip. I was so excited about it, but unfortunately, I couldn't participate.

Shortly before the trip, my throat bloated and swelled and it got really sore, and I had to go to the hospital and have surgery there. I was really annoyed, but that's life.

Niemeläinen: What is the most important lesson you have learned from your parents?

Oravilahti: At first, the most important lesson was that you should focus on school and do a good job there.

Then, when I was in upper grades, my mother and father encouraged me to learn languages. They said it's important, so when my father turned 70, he also wanted to learn languages. You see, he had two nieces in England, my older sister's husband, and he wanted to learn to communicate with them. So he went to community college and studied English there.

And then, when I was already studying at the School of Economics and went to visit my parents, my father took his exercise book and textbook, and then I helped him with his homework. In some families, the affinity for music mentioned earlier is important. We had that, and language learning was also important. My older sister Lissu went to study English too, she received a master's degree in Languages with English and Swedish as her main languages.

Niemeläinen: What languages did you study?

Oravilahti: First of all, when I was a war child in Sweden, I learned Swedish and forgot Finnish.

The Swedish language stayed in my memory so well that when I came back to Finland and went to grammar school, Swedish was easier for me than Finnish. That's why my Swedish teacher often asked me to say certain things in Swedish, so others could hear how 'they speak' in Sweden. Then, as I got older, I realized the importance of language skills, and my passion for learning languages increased. So later in life, when I was married, and my husband got a job in Paris, our whole family moved there. There I attended Alliance Française's French language courses, and I completed two diplomas.

At the School of Economics, there was a young, Spanish-speaking man, with whom my future husband became friends. I met him, too and became very interested in the Spanish language.

I joined a Spanish club at school, led by our teacher Erkki Vierikko - a wonderful teacher. This all started with my interest in Spanish language, which I still have.

Niemeläinen: What key lessons have you taught your children?

Oravilahti: That studying is worthwhile, especially language studies. Study languages so you can be certain that you'll get far in life. Foreign languages skills are so important that you can get a job with them.

My kids are both multilingual and musical, so apparently it runs in genes, and hand in hand.

Niemeläinen: How did you get your first job?

Oravilahti: I guess that being an *au pair* was my first job, even though I was more of a companion or helper.

I only got a small amount of money, but it did include an apartment and food. You can't really count it as a job. As a teenager, I was babysitting kids in this one family for a few months during the summer holiday.

Before getting into the business school, I had to complete some business economics courses, so I got an unpaid internship for a few months in the summer at the Imatra commercial bank. That was my first actual job.

My second job was pure coincidence. Just as I graduated from university, there was a shortage of elementary school teachers. I was asked to work temporarily as a teacher at the elementary school in Ahola. It was a small school about five to six kilometres away. I taught a combined class of 5th and 6th graders. They were wonderful children. We were in a small separate cottage, where they also made the lunch for the children. The cook was behind a curtain while the children and I were on the other side. We even made a school trip to Helsinki by train, and none of these children had ever been on a train. It was fun.

Niemeläinen: Did you teach every subject?

Oravilahti: Yes.

Niemeläinen: For how long?

Oravilahti: One year.

Niemeläinen: When and how did you realize what you wanted to do with your life?

Oravilahti: It was when I applied to the School of Economics. I wanted to learn languages. I figured if I applied to the university, that I would have to study in a way that was very traditional - theory and all that stuff. I had a good example for that in my sister Lissu, because she studied to obtain a master's degree in Linguistics. I saw what she had to read and study. Very old books, sentence structures and all that. It wasn't for me at all. I just wanted to speak multiple languages and understand what people were saying. That is the only reason I attended the School of Economics.

Niemeläinen: Do you remember the first time you used a computer?

Oravilahti: Yes, it was terrifying. I was working as a secretary at the Builders Union and there you had to use the computer. It was in 1988, so it wasn't common yet. I was excellent at using a typewriter, but I couldn't type with a computer. I had to attend a course and learn it that way, which was something different for me.

Niemeläinen: How did the computer affect the way you worked after that?

Oravilahti: It opened up new opportunities. It was so easy to print and make changes. Many things I found hard in the beginning, but they enabled me to do new things.

Niemeläinen: Have you ever worked abroad?

Oravilahti: Besides Britain, I had an internship in Duisburg, Germany. I was there with a fellow student's sister one summer. We spent 2 to 3 months in Kaufhaus Horten, which is a large department store. We worked as cashiers. It was very exciting at first and a whole new area of expertise, though my feet hurt a lot after standing the whole day. I liked serving and meeting new people. As a job it wasn't bad at all.

Niemeläinen: Was this when you were studying?

Oravilahti: Yes. It was one summer between my studies.

Niemeläinen: What about after?

Oravilahti: I have not worked anywhere else, but I have lived abroad.

I lived in Argentina and in France. We moved to Argentina for my husband's job. There he promoted a company called Metex. Metex imported a lot into Argentina and his job was to develop and research the market. I had a lot to do there, since I was pregnant before we moved. We moved there between 1960 and 1961. My husband went first, and I followed soon after. Going there was exciting. It was around the Bay of Pigs Invasion in Cuba and people in Finland were worried. Was there going to be a war and what would happen? We weren't worried. I'm not sure what my parents were thinking. They didn't talk about it.

Everything ended up going well. I gave birth to two children who both adjusted easily. We left Argentina on 1 April 1964 and that was a bit complicated. My husband left first and toured Central America before eventually returning home via the United States. I was supposed to leave Buenos Aires on a direct flight to London. Everything was set up there for me. There was food, a crib for the baby, etc., so that I would be okay for a little while with two children. But not everything went according to the plan.

Right at that time was a lot of political turmoil. There was a military coup in Brazil on 1 April 1964, and almost every flight was cancelled. We were thinking about how we could get back to Finland. In spite of the circumstances, we were able to get seats on an Air France flight to Paris. The plane was full and the flight attendants were very busy. I got some help from other passengers with watching and taking care of the children. We arrived in Paris and from there we informed my sister and my brother-in-law that we would continue towards London. They were still thinking that we would be coming straight from Argentina.

Everything went well in the end, but the atmosphere when we left was scary. We had a stopover at Sao Paulo airport, and there were soldiers with their guns walking around, looking mean and monitoring everyone. That stayed with me for a long time.

After all, there was a lot of turmoil in Argentina before the military coup. We lived in Argentina for four years. During that time, Argentina had three different presidents. The politics of the time were odd.

Niemeläinen: Did it have an impact in your day-to-day life?

Oravilahti: Not really. I was busy with my children and didn't think about those things. I didn't feel unsafe until on our way home when we saw the soldiers.

In Argentina we lived in an apartment owned by the family of a military serviceman – they were stationed elsewhere. Tereso was a captain, or a colonel or something like that. He and his wife were our landlords, and his wife's sister lived in the same building above us. We got to know her and her husband really well. After all they had children the same age as ours, and she helped me, a first-time mother, a lot with the children.

The interesting detail in all this is that her husband Roberto Levingston became the president of Argentina in 1970-71. She told us about it in her correspondence. When we lived there, the presidents were Frondisi, Gido and Illia.

Niemeläinen: Have you ever had a particularly hard or exciting period career wise?

Oravilahti: By education I am a correspondent secretary. There was a title like that back then. It's partly the same as the economics degree, but involves more linguistics. When they noticed how good I was with languages, they started to use it and I became an interpreter for all kinds of things. That way I was able to travel around the world to some very interesting places.

We went to Cuba, Nicaragua, China and some African countries. I travelled a lot. Besides Finnish I spoke French, German, Swedish, English and Spanish. Knowing all these languages was very helpful, and I was able to use them a lot in my more recent jobs. It made me happy and it was a lot of fun. I got to travel. I liked it a lot.

Niemeläinen: What types of jobs did you have?

Oravilahti: For example, I was a private secretary for this one lady. She had a business in cosmetology that involved some importing and a lot of operations. She studied different beauty methods in France and Germany, and I worked as her interpreter. Sometimes I was also a model for new treatments, massages etc. It was interesting and fruitful. Different kinds of nutrients, conditioners and everything that interests women. It was mostly translating French and German. Sometimes even English.

One summer, when I was still studying, I worked as an interpreter in a travel agency. The guide didn't speak foreign languages and I was their translator. Back then you travelled from Finland to Southern Spain in a bus and you mostly lived in a tent. It was a very interesting job. We even went to Gibraltar and from there you took a ship over to Ceuta, a city in Africa that belongs to Spain. You saw and learned lots of things there. I even went to a bull fight.

My latest job was in the main office of the Builders Union, where I was hired as a correspondent, because I spoke so many languages. We had connections to analogous unions in other countries, especially in countries where they needed our support, emotionally or in regards to some guidance. That only made the job more interesting. The job also

included travelling to different countries like Nicaragua, where they speak Spanish, and where the Builders Union built houses for the poor that we went to inspect.

We also went to China, which was an interesting visit. We learned new principles and ways of thinking and it helped us understand how different people live. We had a lot of international meetings that required an interpreter, and to me it was very rewarding, because I liked the job, even though I wasn't properly trained for it.

It always made me happy to be able to help people understand each other when they didn't share a language. It made me feel good and it was gratifying. I liked that job and worked there until I retired in 2000.

Niemeläinen: Did working abroad make any difference in regards to the way you worked?

Oravilahti: Translating the texts wasn't always easy, there were hard subjects. We just had to somehow manage, and we did. And when I saw that the people were pleased with my work, it inspired me to learn more about sentence structures and specific vocabulary especially in the construction field, since it wasn't familiar to me.

What really stayed with me was our trip to Mozambique. There was a big international meeting, and the security wasn't that good. A reporter working for one of the unions was robbed on the streets. They took all his equipment. We always had to be careful. But there were other interesting things, too, like parks and zoos and we rode an elephant. So lots of fun other things we got to do besides just working.

Niemeläinen: If you were 20 again, would you do it again?

Oravilahti: Most likely. A job, where I get to learn and use different languages. I liked it a lot.

Niemeläinen: Have you ever admired any politician?

Oravilahti: This question came all of a sudden. Of course I have. I just don't remember his name right now.

Niemeläinen: What kind of person is he?

Oravilahti: A priest who lived in the United States, I just don't remember his name. He was shot.

Niemeläinen: What do you admire in him?

Oravilahti: His courage and honesty, and his encouragement. He spoke for the black people. You asked which politician impressed me. The first is probably Martin Luther King, who boldly defended the rights of black people in the United States. He always stood behind his words, and he was brutally shot to death while he giving one of his speeches about rights.

Another person in a similar position was Nelson Mandela in South Africa. He defended the rights of the weak throughout his life.

There are many more of these brave people, but these two came to mind first.

Niemeläinen: Is there any particular political events that have personally influenced your life?

Oravilahti: Yes, many things of that kind have already come up. First, the war and my childhood. All those fears and terrors, they probably left some kind of mark on my mind, which I don't even realize yet. Some psychiatrist would probably be able to combine things so that one particular thing is due to another. Maybe, I don't know and it's not that important. Then another thing was going to Argentina, and the events regarding the Bay of Pigs, the US landing there and the fear that it brought. It didn't affect me that much though, I was just thinking about the baby and moving to Argentina, the music and all the beautiful things.

Then, of course, all the evacuation trips that had to be made. We had to evacuate twice due to the wars in Finland. Because of the Winter War and the Continuation War. Of course, this changes a human being.

Last but not least, when we lived in Argentina, the TV reporter Martti Silvennoinen was visiting there, and came to visit us too. We ate lunch and visited the pool arena, which was within walking distance of our home. During the visit, the embassy called my husband and asked him to find Martti Silvennoinen, because somebody had shot President Kennedy in the United States, and he had to be told about it. This was especially memorable. Unimaginable violence once again.

Then the following year was also the military coup in Brazil, when we were departing Argentina in 1964. It foreshadowed everything that happened in Europe later.

In Europe, there was this crazy year in 1968. We were living in Paris at that time.

One day I went out for a walk with a friend, and we wondered why there were so many people everywhere, young people, students. We went to see what was going on, and then it turned out that the students from the University of Naantere and the University of Sorvon were protesting against the closure of the former.

University management decided to close the college in 1968, due to student and management disputes. Then the police scattered the crowd, and the weeks of protesting and marches began. As a correspondent, there was Knud Möller from Finland, a well-known person. He described the rebellion as one where the anarchist student leader and prophet Daniel Cohn-Bendit accomplished everything. He was called 'Danny the Red' . His movement aimed at socialism, but not like the one found in Eastern Europe.

Their protests grew in appeal, and other Western European student movements got involved.

People protested against the Vietnam War, fascism and what was left of it, imperialism, capitalism etc. Buildings were occupied. There was rioting.

This happened in many European countries, most notably in Eastern Bloc democracies, Japan, USA, South America and everywhere else.

I especially remember listening to the radio at home, when this radio reporter Lieko Shalohavan reported from Prague. She was a verbal woman who explained what was going on in Prague, and it was really chaotic there. She cursed and said "I give a damn now, so I'll tell you what's going on here."

I remember her well. She was a really good speaker who lost her temper when demanding that she have a say.

Niemeläinen: Were you involved in any of these events?

Oravilahti: No, I wasn't. My kids were very young then - six and five years old, so I couldn't go anywhere, and it wasn't even on my mind. I supported certain things for sure. You can't treat people and students that way - it's not right.

Niemeläinen: Do you remember when you first voted?

Oravilahti: I don't quite remember that. Maybe when I was 20 years old in 1955, but I really have no idea. When I was in my early 20s, yes. Since then I have voted whenever possible.

Niemeläinen: What does nationality mean to you?

Oravilahti: Nationality, Finnishness. Finnishness, my nationality, mean a lot of things to me, and the more I travel, for example, in Europe or wherever in the world, the more this is the case. The more I see life in different countries, the more I'm happy about my Finnishness, I think. After all, there are disputes, rebellions, strikes and everything else, but in the end, it feels like they're trying to reach an agreement here. Sometimes it can be really difficult, but it is not comparable to killing, torturing and imprisoning people as they do in some countries. I am happy that I am Finnish.

Nationality is one of the most important things for every individual, and everyone should have the right to maintain it throughout their lives. I think it is extremely important.

Niemeläinen: Is it more of a sense of belonging to a place, a community, or a culture?

Oravilahti: It is all of that, but above all, it's the feeling that you belong to a community that is the people of Finland. That is my community.

Niemeläinen: Do you have moments when you thought about identifying yourself as a European, or a global citizen where all people are in the same group? Or do you usually think about you as a citizen according to your nationality?

Oravilahti: Primarily by nationality, but on the other hand, when you think about it, there are so many nationalities in the world, and every person should have the right to nationality. That is a way in which all people are the same and should have the same privileges.

Niemeläinen: Did joining the European Union have some effect on your life?

Oravilahti: Yes! Very much so. Freedom of movement makes it easier for my family to meet, as they live in different countries. The birth of the EU was a very happy thing for me. Travel had less restrictions, and people had the same money and more things in common.

I am very sorry about Britain's Brexit - I hope it doesn't happen. I have family and relatives in England, and my grandchild is studying there right now. It's a big deal.

Niemeläinen: Do you remember your first encounter with a foreigner?

Oravilahti: In Sweden. Well, maybe that doesn't count as abroad. Or maybe it does.

I don't really remember anything other than being excited and interested. I don't remember being scared. Or maybe a little when we war children were first taken for a medical

examination in Sweden. I was pretty sick back then, my stomach was swollen and my mom was very worried back home. My doctor's encounter was okay but it didn't really provide any real answers.

Niemeläinen: Out of all the European countries, where you have been?

Oravilahti: It's a pretty long list, would you rather like for me to list where I haven't been? So, I haven't been to Albania, not sure if I've been to Andorra, though I probably have. I haven't been to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Croatia, Cyprus, Macedonia, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine and Belarus. There you have it.

Niemeläinen: Do you think European unity is more of a political project or a cultural one?

Oravilahti: Primarily political, as far as I understand. It should also be cultural. There is so much culture that unites us. Political issues are most prominent; therefore they seem to be stronger. We have a lot of cultural backgrounds that are similar, so the cultural community is the most natural.

Niemeläinen: Do you remember the first time you made a phone call or watched TV?

Oravilahti: I don't remember when I made my first phone call. When I was a kid, the phone was an important item. Not everyone had it, and children were not even allowed to touch it. Compare this with the present day, where young children, who are just a few years old are calling their grandparents with their own phones.

The first television we got, black and white, must have been when my parents were still alive. I was in the School of Economics, where we did those programs for television. However, that does not mean that there was a television at home.

Niemeläinen: Which electronic device has changed your life the most?

Oravilahti: The mobile phone. Quite a lot. Sometimes I would like to throw it against the wall and return to the landline.

Niemeläinen: Do you access the Internet with your cell phone?

Oravilahti: Yes, I do. But I should study it a lot more so that I can understand everything it does. I use it to the best of my knowledge and how my friends advise me to. Modern day children, like my grandchildren, give me advice on how to use my cell phone, and they get rid of all my issues with that device. Just like that. I would like to have such skills.

Nowadays, I have to call my friend Oravilahti, who will help me and tell me what to do. Sometimes I visit her, and she corrects the errors and fixes my phone. They're the kind of things I can't do myself. That's a big flaw I have.

Niemeläinen: Do you make a lot of video calls?

Oravilahti: Yes, because both of my children live abroad. One lives in northern Sweden, the other in Madrid, where all my grandchildren are. I make a lot of video calls with them. They are all very important to me and it is not so many times a year that you can meet in person. This is why we make phone and video calls. The children become closer to me somehow. It's a wonderful feature on cell phones that I like.

Niemeläinen: Are there any holidays that you particularly like or celebrate? For example, Christmas, Midsummer or Easter?

Oravilahti: Christmas. That's when we try to get together with my children and their families.

Niemeläinen: Do you often meet in Finland, abroad, or both?

Oravilahti: Mostly in Finland. For example, the children in Spain want to come to Finland when it is snowing here. There was so little snow last Christmas. When my grandchild and her father wanted to go sledding on a hill, it was hard to find such a hill.

Birthdays are also celebrated together, if possible. These are the most important things.

Niemeläinen: Is freedom important to you?

Oravilahti: It is.

Niemeläinen: How do you maintain it?

Oravilahti: I should do more to maintain it, especially freedom of speech. Be brave, and say what you think. I, on the other hand, am quite polite and shy so I do not always get to say everything I want to. I have been practicing it in my old age.

Our generation's upbringing and education was so different than younger generations'. You young people are so different from us older people.

We were taught to be kind, quiet and obedient, so we had to work hard to express ourselves and for freedom of speech. Finnish women especially. Even though nobody has actually denied it to them, it's just some kind of shyness and sensitiveness.

It's kind of a 'gentle girl syndrome'. You have to be kind, adaptive and flexible. And you shouldn't disagree or express yourself or your feelings.

Everyone should be equal, and everyone should dare to say what they think without fear of being mistreated, rejected or punished.

Niemeläinen: Did you take freedom for granted? Was there ever a situation where you wanted more of it or that it would become more meaningful for you?

Oravilahti: Yes, it hasn't been self-evident for me.

Niemeläinen: Did the meaning of freedom change for you over time?

Oravilahti: Yes, the older I become, the braver I become. I started to think that now is the time to say what I really think, and not always give in to the suggestions of others.

Niemeläinen: Has it somehow improved the quality of your life?

Oravilahti: Yes, I think so. More still needs to be done, but I'd say that I'm on the right track.

Niemeläinen: Have you ever felt that there was too much freedom?

Oravilahti: No, never.

Niemeläinen: We already talked about opening up the borders of Europe - but what kind of emotions did it evoke? Or did you feel that you were somehow freer than you were before?

Oravilahti: Yes, I can now travel here and there whenever I want, because the borders are no longer closed. That is quite an important freedom for me. That is why it is now terribly

sad that these borders will be closed, and that there must be control at every border, as will be the result of Brexit. How can these borders be drawn with a red line so that people avoid crossing without documentation?

Niemeläinen: At the ages between 20 to 30, were you optimistic or pessimistic about the future?

Oravilahti: Optimistic.

Niemeläinen: What was your attitude towards life before and after that time period?

Oravilahti: It has mostly been a positive attitude. Of course, there are fears, but they are not related to my attitude. For example, I am afraid that something bad will happen to my loved ones, such as my children or grandchildren, even though I know that fear does nothing. Sometimes I am anxious for my granddaughter traveling on the Interrail and I think 'My goodness, what if something were to happen to her?'

Niemeläinen: Is there any way you can alleviate those fears so that you can focus on other things?

Oravilahti: There are some ways I can do that. I received a religious education, and now in old age, it's still there. This means that if I am anxious or scared, I can pray and send messages to heaven. I talk and wonder about what I'm really afraid of here. It could be said that this has changed over the years. I no longer think that I'm alone with my fears.

Niemeläinen: Was ever there something you thought was impossible, but then came true?

Oravilahti: There must have been something, I just don't remember what. For example, I have been concerned or afraid of something, but then things would go well in spite of this.

After that, I feel very grateful that things went this way, and not the way that I was afraid of. Did this answer your question?

Niemeläinen: Yes. Did your parents have any particular expectations of you?

Oravilahti: Surely, they must have had a lot of expectations. My father probably expected me to study music. I blame my left-handedness for not learning it, though I think that if I had had a passion for music, I'd surely have succeeded in it.

Niemeläinen: How does left-handedness affect the study of music?

Oravilahti: With respect to how certain instruments are played, for example. Take my uncle, who was the famous violin maker Yrjö Halonen. When I was a kid, he gave me a violin as a gift. My father tried to arrange violin lessons for me, but learning was too difficult for me. I was left-handed and everything was upside down for me. That violin is still here with me, on that shelf. It would have been wonderful to learn how to play the violin, but at that time, it was not possible to learn it the other way. I don't know how it is today.

Niemeläinen: Did you have hopes or expectations for society when you were young?

Oravilahti: There were certainly many of them. I was empathetic, so when I saw someone who had a bad time in life, it felt horrible. Or when there were people being mistreated. Those kinds of things continue to exist.

Niemeläinen: Do you have any expectations for the development of Europe?

Oravilahti: I wish that the countries of Europe, and the EU in particular, would learn to agree on certain things, that we would have the same basic objectives and values that we work together towards common goals and not act in such a way that some do everything and others do nothing. So that everyone would be good to one another and feel good about each other.

Niemeläinen: When you were young, how did you see the future? What did you imagine the year 2020 would be like for example?

Oravilahti: I couldn't imagine being old or at least what it would be like to be old, even though I saw old people around me and what they were like. At that time I had this idealistic wish that everyone would have a good life, and that everyone would live in peace without wars and violence. It does not seem like it this wish will come true any time soon. It is unfortunate and sad.

Niemeläinen: Despite everything, can you trust other people, or do you feel that they cannot be trusted?

Oravilahti: I trust people a lot.

Niemeläinen: Have you ever been particularly proud of Europe? Or did something happen that made you be ashamed of Europe?

Oravilahti: That is such a big question that it would probably require more thought. I can't answer that now.

Niemeläinen: Did you feel that the unification of post-war Europe was so significant that it somehow sustained this peace?

Oravilahti: I wonder how I could answer this question. When I was working in Germany, in Kaufhaus Horten, I met a lot of young people whose parents had been in the war and had had the same experience like me. Our friendship was based on this. They would give gifts. One girl gave me a piece of her beautiful clothing, because she noticed that I didn't have anything that beautiful. It was great, of course. Also, it was a really strange time, because we had all suffered from the war, and we all had the same age. To some extent, everyone had the same type of experiences and that's why it was easy to talk to them.

Niemeläinen: Was it similar to what you had experienced yourself? Were your memories of the war the same, even though you lived in different countries?

Oravilahti: Not really. For example, what happened to the Jews during the war in Germany, all those horrors. Of course, a lot of bad things happened to us, too, but nothing like that.

Niemeläinen: Do you remember a particularly dangerous moment in your life? Is there any situation that you remember especially?

Oravilahti: There were times when I was afraid that I could fall, be dropped or drowned or something like that. For example, when we lived in Imatra, near the State Hotel, we often went to the beach to play. Koskenranta Beach. There was a rock from where we jumped into the lake. I didn't know how to dive head first, so I just jumped feet first and held my nose. I dived quite deep, and suddenly I got the feeling that I don't know where the water surface

was or where I should go. Then, seconds later it worked out, but at that moment, it was really distressing. It was a strange situation.

Niemeläinen: What role has religion played in your life?

Oravilahti: It has been such a strong force. Stronger at some times than at others, but it has always been present. It's part of my heritage.

Niemeläinen: What events have influenced your attitude towards religion?

Oravilahti: How could I say for sure? Well, at least in the case of wartime atrocities, I thought how it could be possible for God do this and let these things happen? It's the big question that I've been thinking about since childhood. Why?

Niemeläinen: Did your family belong to church when you were a child?

Oravilahti: Yes, as I mentioned earlier, my father was a cantor. My parents met each other at church choir rehearsals. They both had that kind of Christian lifeline.

Niemeläinen: Was it reflected in your daily life?

Oravilahti: It was.

Niemeläinen: Did you go to church often?

Oravilahti: We didn't go to church very often, but church holidays were important.

My father went to church every Sunday, and sometimes he had those church choirs. He was a cantor and organist, and he played well, too. As a teenager, I couldn't go dancing. It wasn't appropriate. One time me and a girlfriend to the Imatra community house for dancing. We were 15 or 16-years-old, and it was forbidden.

I had a really bad conscience afterwards, so I had to confess it to my parents. They forgave me. We didn't do anything wrong there. We probably didn't even dance.

We had those kind of restrictions. Nowadays, there is no such thing. Things have changed a lot.

Niemeläinen: How did religion unite people in the area where you're from?

Oravilahti: Those church choirs were one way. I think about what my father did. He was a disabled veteran who had been wounded in the neck, but he could still play and sing. There were a lot of war widows in the area where we lived, so my father often went to help them. He sang to the sick, and he also went to the hospitals to sing as well. He also sang a lot to my children - hymns, folk songs. One of the most beautiful songs he sang for the children was '*Minä laulan sun iltasi tähtihin*'. It could be compared to a hit song, but it's very beautiful.

Niemeläinen: How do you think immigration affects religion? Now that the religions have come closer to each other in a concrete way, has religion functioned more as a dividing line between groups of people, or do you feel that it still connects people?

Oravilahti: At the moment, I feel that it partly sets people apart, that many are afraid of the doctrines of another religion and perceive them as threats. Peoples fear towards the customs and culture of other religions is not good at all. There might be traits in them that are hard to accept, and they think that it would be better if these other people had the same

way of thinking that we have. They don't think at all that others might feel the same way they do.

This, of course, also depends on how much we know about religion.

After all, how much do people practice their religion according to the right doctrines? Doctrines that were originally agreed upon and learned. How many are pursuing it for completely different needs, for their own benefit, group benefit or something like that. This is such a complex thing. It's hard to take a position.

Niemeläinen: What should Europe be like for future generations?

Oravilahti: I wish there was peace in Europe and no threat of war. I hope that there is a common European consensus on how to behave and act in times of crisis, on how to make everyone feel safe and secure.

Niemeläinen: Are you afraid that some past mistake will be repeated in the future?

Oravilahti: Sometimes I think about that possibility. Sometimes it feels like I see some signs and I think about whether something will happen again in the future.

Niemeläinen: Do you think there will be some progress over the next 50 years?

Oravilahti: From the bottom of my heart, I hope so. Although, I don't know how much I can hope and believe in, because we humans are what we are. People should be able to think more broadly about what would be good for us all, and then act upon it. Of course, this is just a dream. I don't know if it will ever come true, but I hope so.

Niemeläinen: When peace came after the war, did you notice that we were heading in a somewhat different direction?

Oravilahti: After the war, at least in Karelia, where I lived, a lot was done together. Everyone was helping out others, even with farming, haying, agricultural work, digging potatoes, building a house – without pay of course. The housekeeper made a big pot of soup so that everyone got to eat and have a good time. It feels like there is almost no such thing anymore, and it makes me very sad. Voluntary, collective work is forgotten.

Niemeläinen: How do you think the work of an interpreter will change in the future?

Oravilahti: Interesting question. Soon you probably don't need a human as an interpreter – robots will do the interpreting. Hopefully it won't go there. It is good for the interpreter to have human intelligence, language skills, insights, and not just a robot that reads the text that's entered into it. Of course, there are situations where you can use a robot as an interpreter, but I think that that's a bad solution.

Niemeläinen: Are you afraid that national identity will be forgotten in the future?

Oravilahti: I am not afraid of it. I have a strong Finnish identity. Of course, it may be influenced by the identities and cultures of other countries. I don't know what else to say about this.

Niemeläinen: Do you have any advice or something you would like to wish for future generations in Europe?

Oravilahti: I probably would like to say many things if I could say them in an understandable way. At the very least, don't let anger solve things. Always try to agree, negotiate and reach a consensus. Anger is extremely bad for solving problems and leads nowhere.

Niemeläinen: Thank you so much!

Oravilahti: Thank you. It was interesting to discuss these things with you.

Niemeläinen: Yes, it was really interesting to hear your stories.

Oravilahti: Big and small things, and everything between, some topics were too big to say anything smart or wise about them, but you had really good questions, I liked them. Thank you, Elina.