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(Editor's Note: Margaret Ruikka, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Albin W. Ruikka, 5302 Colorado street, a student at the University of Minnesota, Duluth Branch, is a member of a SPAN--Student Project for Amity among Nations--group visiting Finland this summer. Her explanation of the SPAN program and comments and reactions on Finland may be of general interest to area residents as well as of special interest to the many Finnish-Americans living in northern Minnesota . This is the second of two articles she has written about her SPAN experience.)

by Margaret Ruikka

[HELSINKI, FINLAND--During our orientation period we were encouraged to contact people in Finland who would be able to help us with our projects. This was a fantastic Span idea, as one association inevitably led to another.

[The Finns have been very hospitable and anxious to help us, not only with our special projects but with general help and information in guiding us around their country.

[Last week was an eventful one for the Finnish Spanners. One after another we came back from our sojourns with glowing tales.

[One girl told of her evening with Tapio Wirkkala whose industrial designs, in glassware particularly, have won him world-wide fame.

[Another girl studying peat soils spent an afternoon tramping around a peat experimental station with three British scientists and Dr. Erkki Kivinen, the professor of Agricultural Chemistry at the University of Helsinki and a noted peat authority.

[Another Spanner studying the amateur theater visited the sets of two movie companies. She met the director of the movie "The Unknown Soldier," the realistic film which was adapted from Vaino Linna's best seller book about Finland and the last war.

[She also watched the filming of the Finnish national epic, the "Kalevala," which the Finns are making with Russia.

[My most memorable experience was the day spent at Hameenkyro with F. E. Sillanpää, the winner of the Nobel prize for literature in 1939. It was the day of his annual pilgrimage to Myllykolu. So together we walked the few kilometers to his birthplace while he talked about his student days when he was studying biology at the University and the books he has written.

[As Mr. Sillanpää speaks many languages, but not English, I had an interpreter. We had a coffee break along the way and dinner when we returned. I will not forget this remarkable man who enthusiastically sang "My Country This of Thee" in English when I left.

[If it were possible to generalize about my impressions of Finland I would say that there are two typical institutions which the Spanners were able to experience, the "sauna" and the coffee time in a Finnish home, which are so Finnish that most tourists miss them completely.

[Some tourists are like the Australian girl I met in Rovaniemi. For days she had been trying to get a Finnish bath, but she couldn't pronounce the word so no one knew what she wanted.

[Much has been said and written about this Finnish bath, but after experiencing many I have decided that no description can do the "sauna" justice and no words can describe the exhilarating feeling one has after steaming and scrubbing and fanning with sweet smelling birch bark whisks and then plunging into a cold lake. And then perhaps going through the same process several times. There is no other way to take a bath.

[Coffee time is a tradition in the Finnish household. From Lapland to Helsinki, from the farmhouse to the city apartment, the solemn procedure is the same.

[A table set with small cups and demi tasse spoons and laden with breads and Finnish pastries is visible when the visitor is greeted at the door. The hostess pours the first drop of coffee in her own cup, a courtesy to test the coffee, says "olkauhyvä" and then pours the other cups.

[There is conversation and much stirring of coffee until the hostess says "olkaahyvä" again. Then the guests take "Pakko Pulla", a biscuit which is taken with the first cup of coffee.

[When all have finished, a second cup of coffee is poured and the cake or cookies are eaten. Every guest is expected to drink at least two cups of coffee and is welcome to drink a third cup and probably a fourth.

[The Spanner, who above all must be polite, has been conditioned to the second and probably a third cup of strong Finnish coffee if he is very hungry or the family is very insistent.

[The ritual is the same in every household. Many visits mean many cups of coffee and the Spanner who visited often, found that twenty five cups of coffee in one day was more than even he could drink. After that it wasn't just a question of being polite.

[The Spanner likes to think of himself as more than a tourist. Yet he is not quite on the same level as is the foreign student studying for one year in a foreign country.

[During those six weeks, the Spanner becomes more than a visitor. He feels allied to his "Span" country and bonded to its people. And perhaps he even resents the influx of summer tourists who flash through in one or two days and, having seen "everything there is to see", scurry on behind their tour leader.

[Six weeks in Finland has led us to a better understanding of the Span motto—"It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness".

[We realize how little we can learn about a country and its people in a few days or weeks, but more important we realize how very much there is to learn from this small country and its four million inhabitants.