Helsinki Journal, Entry 16, November 19, 2006

In this journal entry, I write about Jen and her life here in Helsinki. Why have I saved her for last? Well, my kids won’t be reading what I’ve written about them for some time, and I don’t need to worry about how I describe my own state of being. What I write about my wife, however, must be done with care. So I have saved the most challenging (and of course the best, Jen) family-member-focused entry for last.

I once heard a fellow describe his wife as being, “hardwired for happiness”. Since then, I’ve used this same description for Jen. Although with regard to her life here, I’d go even further and say that she is thriving. I’ve often heard her say, “I love Finland. There’s so much about it that I’d like to take back home.” Interestingly, she was the most skeptical about coming, but is now the happiest of us all about being here.

The reasons for Jen’s happiness are various. First, the language barrier coupled with the fact that the Finns we’ve met are, for the most part, uninterested in befriending a family of Americans, has resulted in a relative freedom from the demands of friendship. Although this has had its negative aspects, one positive for Jen has been that she has had much more time to do art and related things. Not only has she created a lot of new work in the short amount of time that we’ve been here (below are a couple of examples), she has been able to create a website [www.jenniferbardsleyart.com](http://www.jenniferbardsleyart.com) and a visual affirmation blogsite [jenbardsleyart.blogspot.com](http://jenbardsleyart.blogspot.com). Check these out if you haven’t already.

Another source of happiness for Jen is the change in our children’s lives. The freedom that kids are given here by their parents harkens back to our own childhoods; Jen and I were both allowed to roam free much of the time, and it has pained us somewhat that our children have not had the same freedom. The lack of fear here is refreshing, and though it took some time to get used to, we have adjusted and now do like the Finns do and our parents did. It seems to me that in America, there is an innocence that has been lost, even in the relative backwater of Montana. How justified is the fear that we as a people carry? Can we go back to a less fearful way of being? Has something been lost that can never be regained, or is it just that we have to consciously choose to live with less fear?

Having a small home and only eight suitcases worth of belongings has also meant less house work for Jen, thus adding to her time for other things. One way in which we’ve used some of that extra time is in a weekly half-day downtown. We typically grab a coffee and conversation somewhere and then browse through a museum before heading
our separate ways; we have passes to both the modern and classical art museums. Jen is pictured below standing next to a Van Gogh in the classical museum. The picture was taken during one of our weekly dates.

Another way Jen spends her free time is running in the woods near our place. I had meant to write an entry in the fall when the colors were beautiful about our truly excellent nearby woods, where we both run frequently and will soon be skiing.

Finally, she has gotten involved in the American Women’s Club, which is a good organization. This club has given Jen some new connections with women from the US that live here in Helsinki. Here is an image from a trip organized in October by the club to Lohja’s Tytyri Mine.

Lao Tzu says, “Contentment is wealth.” Well then, I’d say that Jen is wealthy indeed and she brings great wealth to our family.