In these early weeks, there is much to write about, and so topics for these journal entries will, I think, come easily. But as the year goes on, I wonder if once a week will be too much, or that during certain weeks, my journal entries will be so dry as to only warrant storage on my hard drive, not dissemination to you all. I suppose we will just have to see.

This week, I will focus on a trip that we took yesterday to Korkeasaari, which translates in English as “tall island”. (I used my Finnish-English dictionary for this translation, and given that the island is quite tall for its size, with a nice Helsinki overlook, I think I’ve got it right.) A trip to an island is of mild interest by itself, but it just so happens that Korkeasari is the location of the Helsinki Zoo. Its location requires (from our place) either a round-about bus/subway trip, or an easy bus trip followed by an enjoyable ferry ride from the downtown area. We chose the latter.

The zoo’s collection of animals is enjoyable (see the tiger in the title), but its location is even better. The island is small – perhaps 1 mile in circumference – and so, has ample waterfront, perfect for picnicking. Mature trees and an abundance of tiered rock allow for a pleasantly designed collection of intertwining paths. Combined with the now ideal Helsinki weather, walking the island and taking in the eclectic collection of animals made for an enjoyable excursion.

Being the gluttons for punishment that we are, Jen and I thought, after taking in our fill of the zoo, that we’d make the short walk to a public beach across a narrow
straight and a pedestrian foot bridge from Korkeasaari. The beach was very nice – yet another beautiful public spot in Helsinki that makes it such a uniquely livable city. Unfortunately, the kids, being tired from their visit to the zoo, did not behave well. They fought, and did so in a very loud manner. This brings me to the following observation: Finns seem to me to be a quiet people – even, and perhaps particularly, in public places. This observation was corroborated on our bus ride home, when two Brits I was talking to made the comment that the beach that they had just visited was “eerily quiet” given the large number of people that were there. In any event, we left the beach somewhat flustered and embarrassed, and were feeling our “outsider”, and, in particular, our American, status keenly.

Jen on the beach with Korkeasaari across the water.

Various unrelated items. We have finally figured out the kids’ schooling situations. Alex will, as planned, attend the Maunula School’s international program, where instruction is in English, though the curriculum is Finnish. Ellie, who we weren’t sure about until this week, will attend the local elementary school, a short walk from our place. There, instruction is in Finnish, so Ellie will be forced to learn the language, which is fine by us. Both kids play hard daily with the large brood of local kids that live nearby.

I went in to the University for the first time this week for a short while. My office will be available on Monday, and I am excited to get back to work.

Jen has already been painting. In fact, three originals grace the wall above me now.

Our adjustment period from the move is on an ebb, I think, though the work/school transition will no doubt be interesting.