And then there is the inward journey, which is troublesome territory for a chronicle such as this. But the question of how a psyche is effected by life in another country – how the heart is opened and closed, how the mind is broadened and restricted, how a destiny changes, how the soul is morphed – is terribly important it seems to me. And from my current vantage point, when I ask such questions, I feel that I am looking into an abyss, because so much is unknown. Really, most of these questions will be answerable only many years from now, and even then it will only be speculation. For how can we ever know how we become who we are? How much was there at birth; how much a result of our upbringing; and really, how much power do we have to change the course of our lives? Coming here, for me, is an affirmation that I do have free will and that the course of my life truly is to be determined.

Living somewhere, not just passing through, brings its own challenges. A wise man once said, “Wherever you go, there you are.” The truth of this statement has become increasingly evident to me the longer we’ve been here. In some real sense, life returns to normal, even in the midst of new experiences. Family and inner dynamics return to “normal”, for better or for worse. And this return is not seamless, because the backdrop has changed and so ways of being that were once taken for granted, now stand in sharp relief against the new surroundings. In short, the transition to a stable day-to-day existence is difficult, because it won’t be the same as what it was before.

For the kids, the transition is, perhaps, most challenging, because they are forced into what is truly a new world for them – school in Helsinki. Alex is in an international school, with kids in his class from places like Iran and Gana. Instruction is in English. Ellie, on the other hand, is in a regular Finnish first grade class, with all instruction in Finnish and no English speaking classmates. So for them, the transition to stability and some sense of normalcy is a longer road. On the other hand, it seems to me that the potential benefits are greater. As adults, I think that many of us would agree that we would love to have had such an opportunity as a child. Where would we be now if we would have spent a year abroad? If you did have such an experience, the natural question

Contemplating "The Thinker" in Helsinki’s Atheneum Art Museum
is, where would you be now if you hadn’t? So we come full circle to questions of inner growth, metamorphosis and change, and how much our experiences have the power to determine our lives.

Ellie riding home from school with Finnish, condo architecture in the background.
INFO: Ellie is teaching herself to ride a bike, with a little help from us. Alex is playing lots of soccer, both at school and in a league twice a week. I work: research changes little in other places; the main difference for me here is the lack of interruptions. Jen paints, exercises and keeps down the fort.

Alex and Ellie on the Baltic Sea, Seurasaari Island, Helsinki.