



THE ESTONIAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

In our March newsletter we posed the question "Do you need Estonian to be Estonian?" and invited our readers to share their thoughts. We thank those of you who wrote or posted to www.estosite.org. Your responses were varied, sometimes moving, and always thought-provoking.

We have selected a few excerpts to publish in this issue. To read all the comments – and to add your own – go to www.estosite.org and click on the tab "The Estonian American Experience."

Märtsi kuu Teatajas esitasime küsimuse "Kas on vaja eesti keelt, et olla eestlane?" ja palusime lugejatel oma arvamusi avaldada. Täname teid kes kirjateel või www.estosite.org-i kaudu kirjutasite. Teie vastused olid mitmekesised, vahest liigutavad, ja alati mõtlema panevad.

Meie oleme valinud mõned lõiked siin avaldamiseks. Minge ERKÜ koduleheküljele, www.estosite.org (siis "The Estonian American Experience"), kui soovite kõiki kommentaare lugeda – ja enda omi lisada.



*Estonian "show and tell." Eesti näitus
(Source: New York Estonian House archives)*

Being an Estonian is more than being able to speak the language fluently

"I was born in Germany in 1947 and spent the first four years of my life there. My parents and I then immigrated to the US, where I have lived ever since. I have only been in Estonia once, for a two-week period, when I was fortunate enough to have been offered an opportunity to teach a seminar at Tallinn Law School on American jurisprudence in 2010.

Nevertheless, there is no question in my mind that I am an Estonian. Why? Because both my parents were Estonians. They, like thousands of other postwar Estonians were forced to flee their homeland and found themselves in displaced persons camps . . . Nevertheless, my parents, along with all the other Estonians that ultimately found themselves in foreign countries strived to keep our nationality and heritage alive and intact . . . Gradually and naturally however, the American way of life and speaking English became dominant. Nonetheless, we spoke Estonian at home and with all our Estonian friends at the various social functions and in church. There was no question, ever, that we were Estonians living in America.

Slowly, over time, the older Estonians have died and their children and grandchildren have been largely absorbed into the American culture. As a result, the Estonian language is becoming more difficult and scarce to hear spoken in many areas of the US where it was once quite prominent . . . I too have lost the ability to speak Estonian like I once did as a child and young adult . . .

My point is this: even though I have lost my ability to speak Estonian as I once did and even if I forget everything about the Estonian language (which I certainly hope doesn't happen), I will always be an Estonian. Being an Estonian is more than being able to speak the language fluently. It is also a matter of nationality, culture and common values, beliefs and aspirations."

- Mati Järve

One of the primary reasons that I have never paid much attention to EANC or other Estonian happenings in the U.S. is the fact that I don't speak Estonian.

"My father is Estonian and my mother is a descendent of Mormon pioneers. From my earliest memories I have known that my Estonian heritage was unique and something to be proud of. . . Estonian was not spoken in our home because, although my mother attempted to learn Estonian, she was unsuccessful . . .

Although I know a great deal about the Estonian language, my vocabulary is only about 100 words long and I am completely unable to carry on a conversation . . . I went to the Estonian house in Los Angeles with my father once and, while I enjoyed the evening, I felt very much like an outsider because I didn't speak Estonian and couldn't understand any of the conversations that were taking place.

This article in the EANC Newsletter is the first that has ever drawn my attention because it is the first I have seen that addresses my situation. I have spent much of

my life learning about and telling others about Estonia. I very proudly let people know that I am half Estonian . . . I have also made sure that each of my six children have had the opportunity to visit Estonia and learn more about that part of their heritage.

One of the primary reasons that I have never paid much attention to EANC or other Estonian happenings in the U.S. is the fact that I don't speak Estonian. There have been times that I've felt that Estonian speakers in this country are only interested in whatever financial means I may be able to contribute.

So what is my answer to the original question: 'Can you be Estonian without Estonian?' I am 50% Estonian. That is a fact. Whether Estonian speakers treat me as an Estonian will have a great influence on my desire to participate with them in Estonian activities."

- Gayleen Gandy

Eestlane... tunneb ja armastab eestlaste maad ja kultuuri

"Vastuseks: iga inimene võib eesti keelt õppida, nii on väga selge, et see ei ole ühe 'eestlase' ainus omadus. 'Eestlane' ja sellega koos 'eestlus' kui kellegi isiku definitsioon aga nõuab et see isik oskab eesti keelt, aga sellel lisaks, tunneb ja armastab eestlaste maad ja kultuuri kui midagi omapäralist ja erinevat, eriti oma naabermaadest. Mõned kutsuvad seda 'isamaalaseks' olemine.

. . . 'eestlane,' või mõni teine rahvuslane, olla on hingeline tunne, lisaks keele ja kultuuri tundmisele. Sellepärast paljud nn. 'Ameerika eestlased' lakkasid olema 'eestlased' kui nad ennast n.õ. välja lülitasid meie rahvuslikust tegevusest USA-s. Noortele on see küsimus raskem, sest paljud nendest on ainult tuttavad selle Eestiga, millest nende vanemad räägivad. Ma arvan, et sellest pole küllalt ja nad peavad isiklikult oma 'isamaa' avastama, kas see on siis Eesti või USA või mingi segu nendest kahest. "

- Jüri Virkus

Estonian through marital osmosis...

"What about those of us who become Estonian through marital osmosis, as I always like to call it? I was married to a first generation Estonian American for 31 years, until he passed away recently . . . When we got married I tried to learn Estonian . . . but it's a difficult language to learn and although I could understand a little bit, I was never able to carry on more than a very basic conversation. However I was actively involved in the folk dancing in Buffalo and Albany for almost 10 years, and even performed with our group at Esto 84 in Toronto. I considered myself to be part of the Estonian community even though I wasn't Estonian and could only speak very little.

We moved to Long Island and became involved in the Estonian House . . . always bringing our 2 young children along . . . They are now in their early twenties and are only minimally involved in anything Estonian. They consider themselves to be half Estonian, not second generation Estonians. I imagine that their children will consider themselves to be 1 quarter Estonian and by then the language will be totally lost. However, other parts of the culture will survive longer, such as an interest in food, folk costumes, music, dance, bonfires, and saunas.

So the question remains: are my children and future grandchildren Estonian even if they don't speak the language? I think so! "

- Barbara Lindemann

When I was little I had two lives...

"I don't think one needs to be able to speak Estonian to feel they are Estonian in the same way that people of say, Italian descent, don't necessarily speak Italian, but do identify as Italians.

. . . I grew up with my grandparents on a farm in upstate New York, so Estonian was my first language and I learned English when I started kindergarten. I am very thankful to my grandparents . . . that I am able to speak, read and write in Estonian . . .



*Long Island Estonian Children's Summer Camp /
Long Islandi Laste Suvekodu*

(Source: New York Estonian House archives)

When I was little I had two lives, my Estonian one at home on the farm, and my American one at school. As a teen I was involved in Estonian activities at the New York Eesti Maja and it was a large part of my life. When I went off to university I left not only New York, but that part of my life behind and became for the first time more American and less Estonian . . . When I was in my 20s, I drifted back to the Estonian community and visited soviet-occupied Estonia three times in the late 80s. I connected with family and friends there and was so glad to have the language . . .

I identify as an American of Estonian descent, and really only half Estonian at that. My mother after all married outside of the tribe. And it bugs me when my Estonian American friends who mostly socialize with other Estonian Americans refer to their non-Estonian friends as their 'American' friends. I have to bite my tongue not to remind them that we are all Americans . . ."

- Tiina Aleman

I wish every day that I could speak eesti keelt with my mom

"I am an Estonian American. This is a heartfelt and soul deep certainty. Born and raised in Philadelphia, I went to school where no one, but no one had ever heard of Estonia. It wasn't cool to be ethnic in any way in the 1950's and 60's, so I resisted events at the Eesti Maja in Lakewood, Eesti kirik, leerid, skautide laagrid, and the Estonian language classes that my mom pushed so hard for me to attend. Now I wish every day that I could speak Eesti keelt with my mom who passed away last year."

- Katrin Lindepuu

Multiple migrations means several languages

". . . I was a little girl when my parents and I left Estonia. We were able to go to Austria . . . As the Soviets were about to enter Vienna, my mother and I fled, going west. There we lived the French occupation. After my father found us, he decided to go as far away as possible from the Soviets . . . I spent 17 years in Argentina, where we learned Spanish . . . In 1966 my Argentinean husband, our little son and I, we were able to immigrate in USA. Now we learned English . . . I am one of many whose roots are in Estonia, but who has migrated from one country to another. On our way the Estonian language was neglected since there was always a new language to master and no time for Estonian gatherings.

. . . Yes, the Estonian language is important. I wish, I still knew it. But, it is not all there is to being an Estonian. I am proud of my Estonian peasant foremothers and forefathers . . . Each of us express our national feelings in a different way. Some by dancing typical Estonian dances, others by singing our ancient melodies and others research our language. I express those feelings by researching my foreparents and learning about our country's history . . . I also write about my family's memories. When my parents followed us in 1974 to USA, I began to ask them about their memories, their parents' lives, their own lives, etc. I wrote it all down. All of us should do that. Hold on to those memories."

- Sigrid Renate Maldonado, nee Amber(g).

WHO IS JBANC? / KES ON JBANC?

A significant portion of EANC's support goes to the Joint Baltic American Council (JBANC) each year. But most Estonian Americans outside of the Washington DC area are probably not familiar with JBANC. For this issue, we interviewed Karl Altau, JBANC's Managing Director.

Märkamisväärne osa ERKÜ toetustest läheb Ühendatud Balti Ameerika Komiteele (ÜBAK, ehk JBANC) igal aastal. Paljud ameerika eestlased väljaspool Washington, DC rajooni ei ole ehk ÜBAK-iga tuttavad. Intervjuu ÜBAK-i tegevjuhiga Karl Altauga on allpool.



*Karl Altau,
JBANC Managing
Director*

Q. Who is JBANC?

A. Established in 1961, JBANC represent[s] the Baltic-American communities and its three parent organizations, the American Latvian Association, the Estonian American National Council, and the Lithuanian American Council, with the U.S. Congress, administration and its related agencies.

Q. What have been JBANC's most important activities?

A. JBANC worked to keep the goal of freedom for Baltic States alive, and then to support the Baltic countries as they sought membership in NATO. We have not forgotten the tragedies of foreign occupation and oppression of the Baltic countries and peoples, or the need to remain vigilant in an era when energy is ever more used as a weapon for political gain, cyber warfare has emerged as a reality, and international economic worries are of growing concern.



*Karl Altau,
JBANC Managing
Director*

Q. Why should Estonian Americans care about JBANC?

A. JBANC is the watchdog. We are aware of what the powers-that-be are doing and engaging in with the Baltic region, and we make sure that our communities are represented.

Q. How does EANC support help JBANC?

A. It is extremely important to have full-time pressure in Washington DC. JBANC has no other sources of funding than the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian American communities. EANC representatives serve on JBANC's board and its president is JBANC's president every three years on a rotational basis.

Q. What was JBANC's most recent accomplishment?

A. The passage of the Magnitsky Act last year was a major accomplishment. The law will sanction Russian officials involved in the persecution, abuse and death of Sergei Magnitsky, who had exposed a massive tax fraud and scheme by a wide network of Russian officials. In a nearly two-year campaign to raise attention to the case, JBANC was actively involved with the U.S. Congress, Baltic, Central and East European and Russian-speaking communities in the U.S, and global human rights organizations.

JBANC Annual Conference features William Browder and Magnitsky Act



*William Browder and Marju Rink-Abel,
EANC president
(Photo: Peter Alunans)*

On April 19-20, 2013, JBANC held its 10th annual conference in Washington DC. A key topic was the deteriorating political and human rights situation in Russia. Keynote speaker was William Browder, CEO of Hermitage Capital Management and former employer of Sergei Magnitsky, the Moscow attorney who was arrested, denied medical care, and died in prison after uncovering a \$230 million tax fraud scheme involving Russian officials.



*JBANC, EANC members and guests
(Source: www.jbanc.org)*

• **EANC's website now has a new section "The Estonian American Experience."** Post your own comments and read what others have written!

ERKÜ koduleheküljel on uus teema, "**The Estonian American Experience..**" Lisage oma kommentaare ja lugege mida teised on kirjutanud!



• **Estonia is one of the world's preeminent authorities on cybersecurity.** In April 2007, Estonia was the target of wide-spread politically motivated cyberattacks. Since then, Estonia has become a world-wide expert on cybersecurity –Tallinn is now the home of the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence.

Eesti on maailma üks tuntumaid küberkaitse keskusi. Aprillis 2007 sattus Eesti laiahaardeliste poliitiliselt motiveeritud küberrünnakute alla. Sellest ajast on Eestist saanud üks maailma eksperte küberkaitse alal – Tallinn on nüüd NATO Kooperatiivse Küberkaitse Kompetentsikeskuse kodu.

UPCOMING EVENTS • TULEVASED ÜRITUSED



28. JUUNI - 1. JUULI
Baltic American People's Festival / Balti Ameerika

As a sponsor of the 2013 LEP-ESTO Festival, the Estonian American National Council welcomes fellow Estonians and guests to this outstanding event in San Francisco!

2013 LEP-ESTO sponsorina ütleb Eesti Rahvuskomitee Ühendriikides teretulemast kaaseestlastele ja külalistele sellele suurpärasele üritusele San Franciscos!

EANC enables three young Estonian Americans to attend JBANC Conference

In order to be selected for financial support, candidates were required to submit a short essay stating why they wanted to attend the JBANC Conference. The chosen three were:

Elle Law

"As a current junior at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, I live in a college town 'bubble' that is bereft of an Estonian community. As a result, it is difficult to be actively informed of current issues and events relevant to Estonian interests, or to meet fellow peers with Estonian interests. As a half Estonian and holder of dual citizenship with the United States and Estonia, this issue is of great concern to me . . . I believe my civic duty includes voting responsibly and initiating international collaborations with my contacts in Estonia and America . . . I would use my attendance at JBANC's

conference to heighten awareness of current Baltic issues and to form new relations as means for facilitating future collaborations."



*Elle Law, Alessandra Suuberg, Siim Vakkur at JBANC Conference 2013
(Photo: Peter Alunans)*

Alessandra Suuberg

"I am a Baltic-American of Estonian and Latvian heritage . . . and currently in my second year at Tulane University Law School in New Orleans. I completed an undergraduate

degree in International Relations in 2011 and am currently focusing significant attention on Comparative and International Law in law school, and will be returning to the Baltic States this summer for a legal internship in Riga, Latvia . . . This [conference] would be a perfect opportunity to remain up-to-date on U.S.-Baltic relations and Baltic affairs generally while I attend law school in a location largely removed from Baltic-American society . . ."

Siim Vakkur

"I am originally from Tallinn, Estonia and have lived in the United States since 1989. I am 27 years old and I recently went back to college at the Ohio State University to pursue a degree in medicine . . . I would like to come to the conference to get more involved in the Baltic culture that is in the US."

ESTONIAN AMERICAN NATIONAL COUNCIL, INC.

1420 Locust St., Suite 31N
Philadelphia, PA 19102

IN THIS ISSUE

- The Estonian American Experience – What Does It Mean?
- Who is JBANC?
- Did You Know?

- The Estonian American Experience – Mida see tähendab?
- Kes on JBANC?
- Kas Teate?



28. JUUNI - 1. JUULI
Estonian American National Council / 2013 Festival

**EANC is a proud sponsor of the
2013 LEP-ESTO Festival!**

ERKÜ toetab 2013 LEP-ESTO-t!

EANC NEWSLETTER - June 2013

ERKÜ TEATAJA - juuni 2013



*LviX Lakewood Estonian Games 2012 / LVIX
Eesti Mängud Lakewoodis 2012*
(Source: New York Estonian House archives)



*Estonian Independence Day celebration, New York 2011 /
Vabariigi Aastapäeva tähistamine New Yorgis 2011*
(Source: New York Estonian House archives)

THE ESTONIAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE – WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU?