

'I would like to speak with my grandchildren in the Estonian language'

A true story

Estonians have been made to leave their home country many times during the history – either because of the fright of deportation, Soviet occupation or persecution. So happened to my distant relative aunt Ebba.

When the Soviet troops were approaching Estonia's border in 1940 Ebba's family decided to escape from Estonia taking a long risky journey in a small boat across the stormy Baltic Sea. They arrived in Sweden as refugees. Although it was difficult to start living in a foreign country and find jobs the family coped with difficulties.

After finishing school in Uppsala, Ebba continued her studies in France in Sorbonne University. One day she met a handsome man at the university and it turned out he came from Lithuania (the 3rd Baltic Republic now). His name was Julius. Young people fell in love. The language they could use to communicate was French. After graduating from the university Ebba and Julius returned to Sweden because due their politics they were not allowed to return to their fatherlands. They married and Ebba gave birth to 5 children. Ebba as well as Julius wanted to **keep alive their nation's language**. Ebba started to talk with her children in Estonian and Julius in Lithuanian. With each other Ebba and Julius spoke French.

Time passed. Ebba and Julius's children grew up and started their own families. They all got Swedish spouses. Ebba and Julius moved to Germany where they both worked in Radio Free Europe for many years. As they grew older they decided to return to Sweden and be closer to their children and grandchildren.

In 1992, when Estonia had regained its independence, I visited Ebba and Julius. It was a heart breaking meeting after so many years. What a reunion! But when talking to Julius I noticed a sad look in his eyes. And then he revealed a harsh truth – he could not communicate with his grandchildren as they knew neither Lithuanian nor French, and Julius was not able to speak Swedish... Julius showed me Swedish textbooks which he had bought from a bookstore. He had started to learn the basic vocabulary, but Julius was an old man already and he explained he could not understand grammar and remember enough words to develop conversations with his grandchildren who had become Swedes.

Why did I recall the story now? My younger son who has been a global citizen during the last 10 years is dreaming of marrying a French lady one day. OMG! I cannot speak French. So I have asked my son that whoever he is going to marry to one day, I would like to speak and converse with my grandchildren in the Estonian language. He promised to teach them Estonian. I truly hope so.

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