



Blanca Juti



Honest.



Finnish.



WSOY



Magic.

Blanca Juti

**Honest.
Finnish.
Magic.**

WERNER SÖDERSTRÖM OSAKEYHTIÖ

WSOY

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Introduction

In the fall of 2013, I took a brief sabbatical from work. For years, I had dreamt about a period of leisure time, where I pictured myself traveling around the world learning a new skill or working for a not-for-profit organization. But when the time finally came, I surprised myself by coming up with a radically different plan.

When my sabbatical started, I had lived in Finland on and off for some 20 years and though I felt integrated into society, there was room to get to know the country better. I also longed to establish a dialogue with people who would help me see things from new angles and perspectives. After all, our lives are busy and compartmentalized. Designers often meet up with artists, doctors with physicians, writers with fellow authors and entrepreneurs with other business people. Seen from a new light, I understood there is no need to travel the world to see new things and meet fascinating people. All of this existed right outside my doorstep and all I had to do was open myself to new opportunities. My sabbatical wish took shape when I realized I wanted to get to know individuals from different walks of life and in doing so capture an essence of Finland.

With this dream in mind, recorder and camera in hand, I set out to meet people. For a year, extending beyond my sabbatical, I conducted a new interview every one or two weeks. I met 6-year-olds and 80-year-olds; entrepreneurs and people who seed grass root movements; artists and journalists; actors and street performers; religious leaders and philosophers; teachers and sports people. Some were well known while others were citizens like you and me, living their lives away from the public eye.

Each interview was a reflection of an extraordinary person. With each interview I found pearls of wisdom to share with others. During the interviews I came upon stories of leadership, courage, empathy and creativity. I saw acts of kindness and solidarity. I found humor, a can do attitude and positivity.

People often ask me how I chose whom to interview. There was, in fact, no master plan, no lists made in advance, no pre-established categories or criteria. One interview led to another; one discovery to the next.

But it was in conducting one of the interviews that I realized that maybe there was a red thread. I was attracted to people who have a strong life purpose and who consciously or unconsciously, believe they can make a difference. People who sought creative answers to problems, people who saw a myriad of opportunities and possibilities in totally new places and people who saw the extraordinary inside the ordinary caught hold of my imagination. Perhaps too, in meeting these individuals, there was also a personal journey involved; a need to gather up my own courage, find my own voice and look at my own life purpose.

Right from the start, I felt it was important to share what I was learning with others. Most of the stories of this book were first published in my blog. Week after week, as I published the stories, I followed with an equal measure of surprise and gratitude where the posts were being read. As the blog grew in readership I could see that in addition to readers from Finland, there were readers from every corner of the world; from Argentina to Australia, from Brazil to Belarus, from Cambodia to Canada, from Indonesia to Israel, from Spain to South Africa, from the UK to the USA. The stories of these magnificent Finns, it turned out, had universal appeal.

Reading a blog and reading a book, however, are two very different experiences that invite different types of reflection. The Internet is the place we turn to for immediate gratification: we find what we need in an instant, we share a quick experience, we multitask between activities, we find different types of answers to a single question. Reading a book, on the other hand, invites us to immerse ourselves in a specific world. It is in reading this book, that we get the perspective of these life stories as a collection of reflections from a country at a specific point of time. How different are people's answers to the same question? Are there themes that pop up across different interviews? What do these individuals have in common? Are these traits Finnish or a simple coincidence?

This is admittedly, a personal view of Finland, but I hope these interviews are also reflective of this amazing land I happen to call home. Perhaps in reading these pages you find, like I did, answers to some interesting questions about Finland. Why is Finland, a tiny nation sitting at the top of the world, with a harsh climate and a difficult language, often cited as a top country to live in? Why does it wield disproportionate global attention to its size and its weight? Why is the Finnish education system one of the best in the world? Why are Finns one of the happiest people on

earth? Why is Finland the number one country for mothers? Why does Finland attract the world's top gamers and a large share of start-up capital in Europe?

As I was thinking about these questions and making sense of what I had learnt about Finland, I felt a need to group the interviews in a way that would shed new light. Just before I embarked on this project, I had struggled with a similar question at work, wondering how my team could regroup in a way that made us collaborate more effectively and produce better results.

It takes a village to raise a child, the saying goes, each individual contributing in her or his own way to make the child blossom. Likewise, society needs diversity to bloom. At work¹ I had looked for a new angle on diversity to make my team prosper. Diversity, I realized, was not just a matter of background, competencies or functions. It was also a matter of grouping ourselves in mindsets reflective of our strengths and dreams as personalities, which would collectively make us stronger. Ours was a marketing department in a technology company and what we came up with was a framework to organize ourselves into five teams that built upon one another: Dreamers, Puzzle solvers, Epic makers, Activators and Storytellers.

First we had the **Dreamers**, whose role it was to envision what consumers wanted for a product. Yes, of course someone had to model the size of the opportunity and study what was technologically feasible to do, but the dreamers' task instead was to start with a vision of what a consumer would want as if there were no limitations. This team was made up of people from different backgrounds (software user interface, design, marketing and logistics), but as individuals, the dreamers in my team had two very strong things in common; they were all amazing observers of human behavior and they were also radically-out-of-the-box thinkers. When dreamers looked at a problem they always saw the opportunity. They produced hundreds of ideas daily and there was nothing too crazy or far-fetched to consider. There are, after all, no limitations in dreams.

Puzzle solvers were analytical and pragmatic in nature. Where dreamers would typically open up many possibilities, puzzle solvers would hone in on solving a chosen path. Was it possible to execute operationally what dreamers had suggested? If so, by when? How do we break

¹ I am referring to my marketing team at Nokia Mobile Phones, 2010–2012

“the elephant” down into smaller pieces so that the dream is doable? Where would we find the budget and how much should that be? Is there anyone in the world who had explored similar problems and if so what could we learn from that? Without puzzle solvers, who had a special ability to simplify, organize, analyze and program, we would have not gotten things done.

Epic makers amplified things we had both dreamt about and found the means to do. They were people who were action-oriented and knew how to translate a plan into reality. But they were also creative and their name inspired them to maximize and improve the original dream. Epic makers wanted to make sure that what consumers saw was memorable, epic. They made sure all roads led to success, on time and in multiple countries.

Activators had the role of working with partners. When dreams are shared, when others benefit from a dream and can even improve it, magic happens. There is momentum and things just happen faster and easier. Activators knew how to tap into others’ needs and opportunities to build on a dream. They seized the moment and multiplied results because they brought the strength of others in.

Lastly, **Storytellers** were there to tell and record stories. Nothing helps unite people and get things done better than a story. Stories are a human need. They allow us to make sense of life. Stories move us. Stories help us remember. Storytellers were there every step of the way to inspire, engage, bring people together and spark reflection.

Organizing a team like that was not common practice and at first it required some courage. Not only the names of the teams were novel but also the philosophy behind how we built our organization was considered quite unorthodox, yet organizing this way was met with real enthusiasm by the team from the very beginning. The model was simple but the magical thing was that it allowed each of us to look at our jobs with fresh new eyes. Organizing like this in fact, gave us permission, I would even say it encouraged us, to do things in a bigger way. We were allowed to question what we had assumed were truths that could not be challenged. Suddenly work felt like play. The dreamers stopped over analyzing because they were given permission to dream. Storytellers changed focus. They forgot technical language and instead started engaging customers

and consumers emotionally. Epic makers were given the chance to dream big statements. Puzzle solvers realized that looking at a need or a problem is often the best way to find an innovative solution and activators relished getting other people on board. Importantly also, we were given the opportunity to delight in what the other teams were doing better and differently than before and to think how the work of one team could be enhanced by another. Soon we started to see that our team performance was improving. Morale was high and kept climbing. Other teams came to see what we were doing right. And most importantly, consumers noticed. Yes, in a great product you can sense the enthusiasm of the team behind it.

This way of organizing the team made a big difference. It inspired us and made us collaborate effectively together. Our outcome as a team was measurably bigger than the sum of the parts, as we could see from financial results, consumer satisfaction indexes and global market share for our business segment. You could palpably see the changes in the numbers.

Many months later as I reflected on what I learnt from these interviews, I realized that just like my team, society is made up of people who bring about change in different ways. Society needs visionaries, it needs people who can figure out how to do things, people who are great at getting things done, people who collaborate with others to achieve bigger dreams and people who help us make sense of it all. I saw too that in society, loving what we do and being true to our deepest essence is what makes us shine. If you have a predisposition to dream, then dream! If you are great at bringing other people together to work on a bigger idea, then do! You limit yourself when you think only of your profession. In personal fulfilment, remaining true to your essence is as important as your career choice.

In conducting the interviews I saw the same enthusiasm in each of these individuals as I saw in my team, and I saw some of the same qualities. I have therefore arranged the interviews along those lines hoping that the reader gets the same sense of permission and enthusiasm to look at his or her profession or passion in a brand new way.

This book is dedicated to the wonderful people that make up these pages. I thank you for the pearls of wisdom you gave me and many times the friendship that has followed. The book is also dedicated to the generos-

ity of my team members, my friends and siblings Pepe, Gus and Marifer, who upon hearing about my sabbatical encouraged me to embark on this project. I always felt I was writing for them and was honored when they passed on the stories on social media.

My gratitude goes to Chris Bolton and Jakob Henrikson for the design of the book and blog respectively. Without the support and painstaking care of my editors Joel Kontro and Joni Strandberg at WSOY, this book would not have been possible. Thanks to the mastery of Osma Harvilahti the personalities of the people interviewed in this book shine through the photographs in these pages and it is due to the linguistic talent of David Stoneham and Sini Paronen that my English mistakes are not evident and I manage to sound eloquent in Finnish.

I am also grateful to James Veenhoff and Hannu Korpivaara with whom the three title words of the book were coined, with the help of a glass of wine, as we reflected on the wonderful tension between magic and honesty that makes Finland so special.

Helsinki, July 2014

Blanca Juti

Drea•mers

(/'dri:mə(r)s/ noun, plural):

People with unusually keen foresight, whose ideas and visions are considered audacious and maybe even impossible, but who nevertheless, dare to dream against the odds.



The Finnish potato should be the next Nokia

It all started with some twenty piglets. She wanted to buy great tasting food, which was safe and as close to nature as possible. When she could not find it, a light bulb went on. Today the business she started has borne fruit. There are three Anton & Anton shops, located in the Helsinki districts of Kruunuhaka, Ullanlinna and Töölö, which employ some 35 people and delight consumers in search of organic, high-quality, ethically produced food and great service. I meet Niina Hietalahti in her Kruunuhaka shop.

Niina Hietalahti

What was the dream or vision all about?

I used to work as an office assistant and after that I spent three years with the kids. I never really enjoyed working. I could never really understand bragging about how much people loved their work. I now realize I was simply doing the wrong job. When I was at home with the kids, new ideas arose. My father had a pig farm near Tampere and I asked him if we could sell piglets to restaurants and consumers. I had never done sales before, but dad bought my idea. In my first sales pitch I sold 20 piglets! Great restaurants like Chez Dominique, Postres and Olo were buying them, as were individuals in search for something unique. That is how it all started.

A few months later I came to the conclusion that there has to be a change in the way we purchase food. I was inspired by Farmer's Markets in the UK. As a farmer's daughter I also felt what we were buying in super markets in Finland, was very far removed from where the food came from. Fresh produce was often packed in plastic. Chicken came in small pieces in honey marinade. This has of course changed a lot in the last 5 years. A food revolution has happened in Finland. But I really felt we were missing something then. I wanted to bring food to the table that was fresh, grown responsibly and with no additives. I very much wanted to develop customer service culture.

Why do you think consumers just want cheap food?

The big chains have been training people to expect low prices as the key criteria in food purchase. I believe consumers should be much more critical. People should consider whether they value good food, service, craftsmanship, ethical production and experience while shopping and not just cheap prices. We need to reflect about what we value in life. People can choose. Maybe they are not using that power.

I heard you named the business after your son Anton...

Yes, that's true. He's now seven. At the time, an investor and I both had babies named Anton. The only challenge today is that my daughter Elli wonders why it is not called Elli & Anton!

Your business has a very clear sense of branding, was it so from the beginning?

From the beginning, I had a very clear picture of what the business should look like. You can of course pay hundreds of thousands of euros for some-

one else to create the visual identity of your business, but if there is no soul involved, how can you succeed?

I truly believe one of the biggest reasons why we exist after all these years, when other companies did not survive, is the visual identity, design and branding of the shop. I think this is underestimated in Finland. Some people may think it is snobbish, elitist or nonsense to care about such things. I felt from the beginning this would be important. Buying food as an everyday routine can and should be a great experience, one that is also visually inspiring. I was lucky to find like-minded people. The visual design came from Chris Bolton, who loved the idea behind the company when we opened our first shop in Porvoo. We did not have much money but we had people who shared the passion. Chris felt very strongly that the design should start from black and white floor tiles, and black and white furnishings and packaging, which reflect the colors of the food – almost making it pop out – in a playful way.

This strong visual identity also helped us get started. All the magazines and newspapers you can imagine got interested in the concept and we got a lot of stories with pictures in all key media. Our timing five years ago was excellent. A revolution was about to start with locally produced food driving consumer interest.

Talk to me about your suppliers...

One thing led to another. After the piglets, I started to contact local producers. We also found interesting products with a similar ethos to our shop in markets outside Finland. Today, many times it is the producers themselves who contact us. We share who they are on our website.

Still, I believe in Finland we should have more specialized farmers; farmers who understand the value of the food they produce and pay more attention to packaging and pricing.

There is lots of opportunity; for instance, today in Finland we are importing 86% of the mutton we consume. That shouldn't be the case! At Anton & Anton, we only sell Finnish meat with the exception of organic chicken which we import from Sweden, because you can't find it in Finland.

Tell me about your team. There must be a sense of accomplishment in employing 35 people...

We have a great team and today's success would not be possible without

those people. Our CEO is Andrea Hasselblatt. She shared my passion four years ago and has been in charge of the company since 2010. We were very lucky to find a person to commit to the company in such a way; investing into the company and putting her heart and soul into it. Today, the company is partly owned by Andrea, TukkuHeino Ltd (which is the majority shareowner of the company), cookery and wine writer Arto Koskelo, my father Jukka Mäenpää and me. Chairman of the board Petri Heino, who runs TukkuHeino, a family owned wholesaler, is a wonderful person with a long-term perspective on doing business. This is rare where quarterly earnings dominate today's business world.

I am also proud of the contribution we make to society. I just did some research to calculate how much the team has contributed to taxation and social security and it is a significant amount. Then again, I do believe Finland could do more for entrepreneurs. Especially in the service sector there is a lot of employment potential and demand to be met. In April 2013, I pulled myself off operations so as not to burden the administration – but I am not entitled to any unemployment benefit. What politicians say and what actions follow are not in sync, one big issue being social security for entrepreneurs.

Where would you like to take Anton & Anton from here?

We are thinking of opening new shops but in a slightly different concept. We want to make ready-made food for families; food that is high quality, ethical but easy to make. People are so busy these days. We could contribute through our own kitchen.

Today our ready meals are growing and sales of ready meals are as much as the meat counter sales. We have a service where we plan three meals a week for a family of two to four. You can buy a bag that contains all the ingredients and recipes you need. Fish one day, vegetarian the next (“meat-free Monday”) and a third day with a meat-based recipe. Each day there is something that is half ready-made. We had ratatouille with couscous last week. The ratatouille was ready and all you had to do was add the couscous. We are building our website for that and we offer home deliveries in the capital area. Our plan one day is to build an Anton & Anton department store; a place that comes to mind when you think of good food, whether at work or at home.

Where would you personally want to go next?

Sometimes I wonder if I should go into politics. I also feel I could now use what I know about the food industry to help farmers develop their products. Finland's food exports are underdeveloped. In Finland, we export 1.5 Bn EUR of food per year, while the Swedes export 5 Bn. Why?

Finnish food production is of extremely high quality – we have short summers and long winters, which impacts food quality a lot. There is less need for pesticides. Plus we have good food traceability. I believe the Finnish potato should be the new Nokia; it has huge export potential! In St. Petersburg markets, I have seen organic French potatoes. This is strange; we are much closer to Russia and nothing rivals Finnish potatoes in taste and quality. We simply have the best in the world. Because as they grow in such a short time period with 24-hour daylight, their taste is intense. People all the world over know salmon is from Norway. Finns should own the potato in the same way!

We need to get better at packaging and marketing. We also need to understand that our level of salaries cannot sustain bulk sales. We need to find ways to develop our produce and give it more value.

What inspires you?

People! I learn from people. I was never a good student. I learn and get inspired by people I meet.

What is on your reading table?

I am not a big reader. I just met a friend of mine from school. We had a 20-year graduation party. She said: "You always knew which were the it books that should be read, even if you didn't read them yourself!"

I am reading a couple of books at the moment. I am almost embarrassed to say they are not it books. I am reading Anton Chekhov's novels. There was a one liner in *The Steppe* that was amazing! It read something like this: "I tell you this, that if everyone were to go in for being learned and refined, there would be no one to sow the corn and do the trading; they would all die of hunger."

I think continuous academic education is overrated. Of course I value education, but there are lots of educated people today who are unable to find jobs. We promise people education is the road to success, but in reality there are not even enough jobs for well-educated people. On the flip side, entrepreneurial characteristics are not respected and supported in school.

I am also reading Sixten Korkman's Economic Utopia. I want to understand how the economy works.

**Sounds like you are more bookish than you admit:
did Chekhov inspire Anton's name then?**

Well, his three names are Anton, Leo, Viktor... as in Chekhov, Tolstoy and Hugo... Maybe great writers will inspire him!

Three words that describe you...

Curious. Daring. Idealistic.

What is perfect happiness to you?

Kruununhaka, our local neighborhood! We moved from Porvoo a year ago. We had long commutes to the city. I find enormous happiness in living close to where I work (my husband also works in Kruununhaka). Anton went to the local daycare Vironniemi. Vironniemi kindergarten is the best decision we made when we moved from Porvoo. What a wonderful place that is! Local services and a sense of community are very important to a person's quality of life. This relates to what we spoke about earlier, how we consume and what we value. I treasure safety and how kids can walk in an area feeling protected.

There are a lot of possibilities in Helsinki. In the last couple of years Helsinki has changed a lot. Movements like Restaurant Day and Cleaning Day are opening Finns up, who are naturally shy, to interact more with their communities. This is in turn influencing other cities in Finland.

How do you relax?

I started singing. I have a singing teacher and I also sing in the Vironniemi kindergarten choir, Kenkävahto (shoe polish)! This is something I have now time to do, because I do not have to commute and waste time in the car.

What is the most overrated value?

I already mentioned excessive education. Walls are also overrated! By that I mean sacrificing too much to own a place. People too easily fall into a mortgage trap to get a bigger home! Instead I believe that finding a community that shares your values, where you can trust and be trusted and where you can find the best qualities in yourself is the key to happiness.

What is the most underrated value?

Time is very underrated. As I mentioned earlier, now that we live in a “village” where we live, eat, sleep, study, work and meet our friends, we have a much better life.

Do you have a life motto?

The best way to find out whether you can trust somebody is to trust him or her!

Niina has since continued to put her love and effort into making the Finnish potato an international icon.

Finland tops the world charts in education, child welfare, happiness, as a place to retire, in transparency and in competitiveness. The country is bursting with energy, as illustrated by its dynamic grass root movements and fast growing start up scene. How is it that a country sitting all the way up north with a harsh climate and a difficult language manages to capture the world's imagination? **Honest. Finnish. Magic.** is a collection of interviews that attempts to answer this question through the voices of some truly unique people who live and work in the northern latitudes.

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Blanca Juti came to Finland some twenty years ago to follow her heart. Although she has lived in and enjoyed many other countries, it is Finland she chooses to call home. Her love for Finland is manifested also in the work she does. Having worked with iconic Finnish brands Nokia and Fazer, she is now devoted to Rovio, the makers of Angry Birds, where she is Chief Marketing Officer. Blanca Juti travels around the world for work, but she always returns. When in Finland, you can find her deep in the Finnish countryside attempting to ski or come summer on the steps of the Helsinki Cathedral enjoying an ice cream.

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