

A black and white close-up portrait of a man with long, light-colored hair and glasses. His eyes are closed, and he has a serene, slightly pained expression. He is wearing a light-colored, possibly knitted, garment. The background is bright and out of focus.

PETRI SILAS & EICCA TOPPINEN

EICCA

THE CONNECTION CREATOR

JOHNNY
Kniga

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All photographs are from Eicca Toppinen's personal photo albums, unless
otherwise noted.

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An imprint of Werner Söderström Ltd
PO Box 1259, FI-00101 Helsinki
FINLAND
ISBN 978-952-3-62035-3
Printed and bound in the EU.



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PROLOGUE

EINO MATTI TOPPINEN sits on a boulder by the shore, turning his gaze towards the setting sun. Like so many others in countless generations before him since the dawn of time, he views the open sea as a vast theater of significance, mystery, parables. The ocean is eternal. It is just as volatile as it is permanent. The cradle of life and the embrace of death, the timeless allegory of all that exists. Untamed and seductive, forever changing.

The Baltic Sea is an ancient passageway providing people with an opportunity to travel basically anywhere in the world. The same unfathomably formidable mass of water washes the rocks, sands, swamps and glaciers from here to the four corners of the globe. This sentiment is heartrendingly romantic and palpably comforting at the same time. Thoughts like these have no doubt passed through the minds of many people who have sat here, in this very spot, throughout the millennia.

This is one of Eicca's favorite places in the entire world. He has come here from his home port in Sipoonranta, some fifteen minutes away. His trusty day cruiser, a Sailfish 26, is moored close by. He purchased the Finnish-made vessel about fifteen years ago after careful consideration and can no longer imagine life without it. The boat has been a lasting source of adventure, joy and excitement. It has even served as Eicca's home for a couple of summers.

Eicca got used to traveling by water as a child when the Toppinen family would take all sorts of trips from their summer cottage in Northern Karelia by car and by boat. It was there, even before he went to school, that he first started dreaming about one day having his own boat. The idea never died as he was growing up, but he wanted to make sure he could invest enough time and energy in boating before he made the leap and actually bought one. He first tested his feelings and motivation by borrowing a center console boat from a friend of his sister's.

His goal was to figure out whether he was just infatuated with the idea of a boat or whether he truly, madly, deeply wanted to have one. After one summer of navigating around, getting familiar with the necessary repairs and whims of the engine of the *Terhi*, Eicca was sold. There was no turning back. His boating fever would not subside until he had a vessel of his own. Eicca passed the word around and got a hot tip from his friend and Apocalyptic bandmate Paavo Lötjönen about a boat in Parainen that was available. After a test spin, Eicca became the proud owner of the white Sailfish.

Getting the boat to Sipoo was a lesson in itself. The previous owner had piloted the vessel to Hanko, and Eicca went with the owner's son to retrieve it and steer it to Sipoo. The swell of the sea was considerable, and getting out of the harbor between the rocks took some effort, with six-meter waves crashing against

the pier in a 20 m/s wind. Piloting the boat to the open sea was a source of both relief and anxiety. On the one hand, no more fear of crashing into the rocks. On the other, no shelter anywhere. Just a raging mass of water.

Recalling this escapade, Eicca sees perhaps more clearly than ever before how boating can be therapeutic and relaxing, but also a means of overcoming his fears and toughening his character. He has wanted to challenge himself as a skipper and test his limits at sea in many ways. Often, he launches the boat in April when there is still some ice in the water and only beaches it in mid-December. Coping with engine failures, sudden changes in weather, minor fires and other surprises has hardened his belief in his own abilities. Facing the forces of nature forces one to be humble. And in the end, boating is probably a so-called right-brain activity.

This little island beyond Sipoonselkä bay, near the islands of Kaunissaari and Mustahevonen, is a place Eicca is happy to return to. Here, breathing is easier than anywhere else. He may prepare a little picnic meal or just wander around and go swimming. Observing nature makes the heart rate drop. Waterfowl swim among the rushes, spiders scurry on the trunks of the ancient pines and spin their webs. There is a lot to monitor once you calm down and start looking around carefully. A large shingle field in the middle of the island makes the imagination tingle—especially since these formations are known as “Devil’s Meadows” in Finnish. It is easy to envisage humans being drawn to this geological oddity from time immemorial. Just a few steps away, the sea is settling down for the night. The only thing constant is change itself.

1

I REMAIN THE FOREVER OUTSIDER

I WAS BORN in August 1975 with two parents and one sister. My mother, father, big sister and I were later joined by two more girls and a boy. The backdrop of my childhood and teenage years was the Northern Hakunila area of Vantaa, some twenty kilometers from the center of Helsinki as the crow flies. My family moved there when I was seven years old. Our home stood alongside very similar houses in a drowsy suburban area and there were plenty of kids around. Many of them were about the same age as me, so there was always something to do. I have very fond memories of this era. We would play Cops and Robbers and all the other regular stuff I guess children everywhere get up to when they're about to start school.

We would play Finnish baseball and soccer and do all kinds of stuff outdoors pretty much all the time. Winter, summer, and all the stops in between. Our home was located in a cluster of houses at the top of a dead-end street, so it was quite a safe

environment to roam around and get up to whatever. The lot across the street from our house was empty apart from the rusted hull of an ancient truck and a big sandpit where we would build all sorts of epic racetracks for our Matchbox cars.

I am no longer in touch with any of the people from that period in my life. Not by choice, though, just pure coincidence. I guess the biggest change in everyone's circle of friends after starting school happens when their hobbies and life in general start to pull them away from the places they grew up in. Kids usually tend to play with whoever happens to live nearby, but not too many of us bond for life with our earliest friends.

Having said that I must confess that I have always been lousy at maintaining day-to-day relationships. And even though I am painfully aware that my current occupation and way of life plays a major role in alienating me from people, I initiate contact all too infrequently even with my siblings and parents. Whenever we do see each other at some wedding, funeral or other family function, I wonder why I haven't called or texted them or whatever. Maybe this tells you something about me. Or them. Or maybe both.

I quite enjoy playing the part of the lone wolf or the outside observer hovering at a distance, looking in. It sits naturally with me. Aloof is maybe not the right word, but I don't usually like to draw undue attention to myself. Nevertheless, if I find myself in a situation where the urge to belong becomes overwhelming, I can all of a sudden hog the spotlight like nobody's business. I know this is paradoxical, and I should add that these feelings have changed significantly since my early childhood. The craving to be part of something felt more important and was a lot easier to satisfy as a kid. Children are around pretty much the same people in pretty much the same places pretty much all the time.

The change begins with puberty and is exacerbated with the onset of adulthood. My life was irreversibly changed when constant traveling became a given because of my choice of profession. One of the reasons for wanting to do things my own way is a strong belief in my own instincts. I usually get the best results in any situation when I follow my own playbook. And this is why I remain the forever outsider in every crowd.

As I've grown older, this trait has manifested itself in a plethora of ways. If I come home from a long tour abroad and want to kick back, I may go hang out at a place like the Club Tavastia in Helsinki. When I'm there I take to the scene like a duck takes to water. The place is packed with familiar faces, and I mingle happily with the crowd. I listen to people, sympathize with their ups and downs, and then go home. And when I'm off on another tour, in some other corner of the globe, I know the same people will still be there having a good time together. I am not missed, and the wheel keeps turning.

Parting with some people may be bittersweet, but when I'm in my own bubble I don't really think about them or wonder what they might be going through. Until I come back and see them face to face again and go through the same motions as last time. But again, I'm only sort of visiting their sphere of influence. As a kid, I would sometimes get terrible bouts of separation anxiety when music camp came to an end and the tightly knit temporary "family" of people would disband and go their separate ways.

My life as a little boy in a placid area of detached houses ran along smoothly. I bet the only thing that has changed in Northern Hakunila to this day is the scenery itself. In the early 1980s the region was less populated and the natural environment much more abundant. Many stretches of woods and meadows from my childhood are gone now, eaten up by people, their homes

and roads and infrastructure. When I was growing up there the scenery was very different. It wouldn't be wrong to call it the countryside. The place offered a certain array of possibilities but also had its limits.

My father was quite a disciplinarian, and he liked to be in control of things. Me and my siblings were not allowed to go where we wanted to go. In fact, our range felt very small. Especially since there were no substantial threats in the neighborhood. No busy streets or roads or railroad tracks or any bodies of water. But as in any other lively suburban area, there was always something going on in Hakunila. So of course, it was a drag to have to stay within shouting distance of home pretty much all the time. When I became a father, I never demanded that from my children.

I was quick to learn how to bend the rules and managed to get up to all sorts of mischief. So in hindsight it was probably a good idea for Dad to at least try to confine some of the youthful energy me and my friends were running on. We would light campfires in the woods and smoke cigarettes whenever we could get our hands on them. My teacher caught me smoking at school when I was eight and I was stupid enough to claim that I'd gotten the cigs from my dad as a reward for a little chore. That little lie died a quick death.

The local mall was the main setting for me and my friends' escapades. We would break stuff, mess places up, shoplift. This idiocy came to a head for me when I got caught at the age of nine. I'm glad I did. My behavior was somewhat dichotomous. When I was close to home I played nice. But when I spent time with my friends I wanted to be one of the baddies rather than the goodies. Because my younger siblings naturally took up so much space at home, goofing off seemed like the easiest way to get some attention from my parents.

Even though my father's constant worrying and surveillance was massively overdone, almost irrational in such a safe environment, I have come to realize that it had its upside. His kids stayed safe from harm, which is naturally the most important thing for any parent. But I still don't fully understand his actions. No one can control everything when it comes to kids. Nevertheless, he mellowed out with time and eventually became almost as laid back as my mother. I remember my parents later on as a very nice, easygoing couple, with such good social skills that many of my friends really liked them a lot and spent a lot of time at our place.

My father Timo hails from Joensuu in the South-Eastern part of Finland, close to the border with Russia. He studied to become an engineer, carved himself a niche in logistics engineering and advanced quite high up the ladder in his field. He was part of the team that designed the logistics software for some of the biggest retailers in Finland. If I'm not completely mistaken, at least some of the root logistics firmware still run by companies like Alko and Kesko is based on the programs my dad and his team coded at the onset of computer automation in Finland in the early 1980s. Dad's favorite hobby was playing the piano, and in time I came to understand just how well he had mastered the instrument.

Dad had to travel pretty extensively because of his work, but whenever he was home, teaching us good manners and personal conduct was among his top priorities. He wanted to make sure his children knew how to behave, had good table manners, that sort of thing. His never-ending efforts to "civilize" us were tedious at the time, but these days I can't find any fault in knowing how to act or understanding the etiquette for more formal occasions when you need to. Dad's not upper class, he doesn't come from high society, but he did grow up in the city.

I've sometimes wondered if moving to suburban Hakunila felt like a downgrade of some sort to him.

I can't put my finger on the exact feeling or the reasons behind it, but there was a certain otherness to our family. We were not quite the same as other families in our neighborhood. It wasn't a sense of superiority, but more a perception of not totally fitting in. It was only when I was almost 25 that I began to realize that not everything is necessarily like it first appears on the surface. I noticed little nuances and details that I had registered but couldn't decipher as a kid. Children everywhere tend to put their parents on a pedestal, but that way of thinking is not without its risks. It may be damaging for children to suppose that their mom and dad are totally devoid of the ubiquitous negative traits that they see in every other adult around them. Anyway, even though our family had our share of things that we swept under the carpet, us kids were taken very good care of. From the first, and always.

My mother Pirkko-Liisa comes from the Outokumpu region in Northern Karelia, mainly known for its copper mining and processing industry. She was a practicing architect but quit her job to become a housewife when I started school.

My mother and her father had the patience of saints, and I inherited the same trait. By this I mean that I can remain calm in situations where most people start climbing the walls. But that doesn't mean I give up easily. On the contrary, even as a kid, if I thought something was worth fighting for I would keep looking for new angles to drive my point home. I don't remember the instances myself but there have apparently been cases where I persistently and repeatedly came back to an idea of mine after my dad had already shot it down several times. Of course, this didn't happen constantly. Only with things that were very important to me. I'm sure these experiences form the foundation

of my ability to manage in a crisis. And however funny it may seem, I never actually argued with anyone as a child. Not with my parents or with any other kids. Quarreling is a skill I could never master, and I never did pick it up from anyone.

More often than not, my strategy in conflicts is to withdraw or comply. At a certain point, this became a serious internal problem and I had to take active steps to modify my behavior patterns. For example, if the two people in an intimate relationship don't have an equal say in mutual matters, the power over making decisions tips unhealthily to one side. A clear reciprocity is the foundation for balanced interactions between people in any situation. Aren't we supposed to help our partner to mature as a human being by providing them with a safe, supportive environment where they can feel challenged and encouraged? That's how we find our place in life in general. But when these issues arose, my solution would usually be to retreat and bury my negative feelings deep inside.

I thought I could handle it. Or maybe I didn't even think it through. It's only in recent times that I've come to realize what a harmful pattern I'd gotten used to wrangling with my father. Giving in almost became an automatic response, and that can't be right. Trampling on your own beliefs, needs and values is like funneling more and more waste into a cesspool without ever emptying the tank. If the load is never emptied, then all the shit will start to overflow some sunny day. And this can lead to tragic, uncontrollable consequences—the most extreme cases being news stories like “To everyone's surprise, an even-tempered family man slaughtered his wife and children before shooting himself”.

My mother was very self-sacrificing and probably just made a conscious decision at some point to give in and assume the role my dominating father had outlined for her in his blueprint

for our family. People occupy their own spheres of influence in any group, and my mother most likely just thought it was easier to make her mark on the things that were important to her from the background. And because there were five of us kids, she had her hands full anyway. Mom never showed any signs of discontentment, but I'm hard pushed to believe a highly educated person who is flourishing in her profession can simply switch off the drive to create or douse her inner flame of ambition. Her weekly comfort and getaway were her various art and language classes at the local community college. While she was off studying Japanese or whatever took her fancy, Dad would read *Donald Duck* comics to us kids at home.

My mother's decisions have given me plenty of food for thought as an adult and I have spent a considerable amount of time thinking about the choices she made. It is wonderful that parents have a natural tendency to support their offspring in their hobbies and endeavors. But if they relinquish their own hopes and dreams in the process, the contradiction between their actions and their words can become a vast chasm. And this is why I have often voiced a wish that Mother would still start new hobbies or revisit some old favorites. However, the onset of a serious illness in her seventies is an impediment no one could have escaped. But Mom is still the kind-spirited, sensitive artist she always was. She's a bit of a hermit. She loves to go roaming around alone through the familiar woods at the summer cottage. She's very adept at drawing, and she used to make us bespoke greeting cards with a picture of each recipient that captured the essence of his or her spirit and persona to a tee.

My parents became grandparents for the first time when I had children. Things could have gone quite a lot smoother. Mom wanted to assume an active role in the life, upbringing and education of my sons, but Dad had some issues with it. It was

the first time he and I ever really locked antlers. A resolution of a kind came when my parents moved permanently to the family's winter-ready cottage in Southern Karelia.

I was very disappointed when that decision was announced. The physical distance of about two hundred kilometers was enough to prevent a solid bond from ever forming between my sons and my parents. A more selfish reason for my frustration and chagrin was that a little childcare assistance every now and then would have come in handy. Not that the help of grandparents should ever be taken for granted. But everyone with kids knows what I'm talking about. I was resentful. Especially since Mom had expressed her interest and willingness to be an active part in the boys' life. Whereas Dad had his doubts.

To add insult to injury, Dad would sometimes seem to question our need for childcare. This hurt me because me and the boys' mother never asked for their assistance just to go out and have a good time or for some minor reason. I found it hard to take that my father's desire for control extended even to his grandchildren. So, there were occasions when my mom would travel by herself to our place to be with the boys. Fortunately, she now has a total of ten grandchildren, so she has probably enjoyed her share of grandparenting bliss.

I feel sorry for both my parents for fundamentally the same reason. My father had a very prominent career as a logistics engineer but his career is no doubt the reason he gave up any hopes of becoming a professional piano player. Even in his fifties, my father was a glorious pianist who performed Beethoven and Rachmaninoff sonatas with fervor and poise. And I'm talking about the more difficult pieces that your everyday hobbyist pianist can't even touch. It feels bad that someone who loves music so much couldn't make it his livelihood. My mother got to express her artistic tendencies later in life when she created

the illustrations for Heli Thorén's children's book *Penny ikävöi*, but I'm certain that the book didn't represent the extent of her creativity. It's too bad her original artistic style didn't get out in the public eye more.

As regards the character traits I inherited, the "calm as a Hindu cow" attributes from my mom's side are offset by my dad's uncompromising and temperamental nature. He inherited that stubborn streak from his father. I didn't meet my long-since departed paternal grandparents that often, because it was hard to get them to travel South from their home in Joensuu, and our place wasn't big enough to accommodate them. I can't say I really knew them as people. In my memories my grandmother was gentle and charming, my grandfather more analytical than emotional. Truth be told, I didn't actually like Granddad, because he seemed so unconditional in his opinions, at least from a child's perspective. I wasn't scared of him, and he did have a gentle streak, but visits to see them often ended with my dad and him arguing, so I didn't really like going there. Even if I don't consciously recognize it, experiences like that surely left their mark on me. The funny—or tragic—thing is that as I have gotten older I've come to realize that my father's father and I are cut from a very similar cloth.

All my adult life, I have worked very hard to be able to mentally forgive every argument, and everyone involved in them. Many people tend to spend vast amounts of their time and energy trying to patch things up with the people themselves, or they at least entertain hopes of some sort of acceptance. But the fact remains that disputes and conflicts can also be worked out alone, or with the help of an outsider. As children, we all want our parents to see us as we want to be seen, and if this doesn't happen the repercussions can be drastic and far-reaching. The layman psychologist in me contends that I have inherited my

susceptibility to disorders connected with mood and attention from both the X and Y chromosome.

I have a high tolerance for stress and I am also able to differentiate things worth fighting for from things that can be temporarily sidelined or ignored altogether. The March 2020 COVID-19 lockdown is a recent example of this. I lost little to no sleep over the fact that the catastrophe meant a total standstill in Apocalyptica's activities. The massive scale of the event made me see that the situation as a whole was completely out of my control. There's no use wasting my breath running around and panicking. Much smarter to concentrate on the little things and try to put out whatever fires I can tackle myself. Being solution-oriented like this is something I had already picked up even as a child, and it has been my compass ever since.

The downside to this when I was a child was that I would concentrate intensely on anything that I happened to take a shine to and leave pretty much any uninteresting thing unfinished. I have also experienced periods of some sort of hyperesthesia ever since my childhood. I can get anxious if the lights are too bright or if I feel there's something off-kilter about my socks. Minor details like that. The neural structure of the entire Toppinen family is probably a little lopsided. My father, for example, was always biting his nails. Mulling over the contradictions in my personality has kept me awake at night many times. On the one hand, I'm very adaptable and can function in pretty much any situation. On the other, I have preferred a specific kind of underwear and socks for I don't know how long and will wear my clothes to the very end until they are so tattered and torn that I have no choice but to get rid of them and buy replacements. So it was very easy as an adult to say yes to a couple of outdoor garment manufacturers when they approached me with a little marketing collaboration in mind.

AT HOME BETWEEN WORLDS

Ripped jeans and band T-shirts are not your typical attire among classical music students. But the future soul of Apocalyptica was cut from a different cloth. The saga of Finland's most renowned cello player is exciting, inspirational and extraordinary.

When Metallica drummer Lars Ulrich chose his wedding music, Eicca Toppinen got the call. When Richard Wagner's bicentennial celebration required extra zest, Eicca Toppinen got the call.

The story that defies all odds began when Eicca and his friends from the music school decided to arrange Metallica for four cellos. Today Apocalyptica are million-sellers—and there's no end in sight to the band's global success story as their unique crossover keeps gaining momentum.

All the while, Eicca led a happy family life raising two sons until his marriage came to an end. The divorce was not easy, yet crucial for his inner growth.

"I believe that by being truly present in the here and now, we are at the same time eternal."

– Eicca Toppinen

Petri Silas is a professional music writer with a career spanning over three decades. He has followed Apocalyptica from day one and has become close friends with Eicca on the way. He is the author of *Chaos, Control & Guitar*, the authorized 2020 biography of Children of Bodom frontman Alexi Laiho.

