BÁIKI

an American Journal of Sami Living

Issue 1 Fall 1991

Who we are: Sápmi

Faith Fjeld

Part one:

The people of Sápmi—the Sami (Lapp) people—are an indigenous population who form an ethnic minority in Norway, Sweden, Finland, the Soviet Union and North America. Sápmi has several interrelated meanings which refer not only to the various geographic regions where Sami have settled, but also to the Sami population as a whole and an individual who is a Sami. Moreover, Sápmi means the Finno-Ugric Sami language.

Earliest sources show that the Sami have always inhabited many of the areas where there are permanent Sami settlements today. This includes a large part of northern Scandinavia. Evidence of possible Sami settlement in Finnmark, the northernmost province of Norway, dates back to the Komsa culture (7000-2500 B.C.) and rock carvings near Alta, Norway, dated 2000 B.C. show Sami people doing Sami things.

According to the Nordic Sami institute, 30,000 to 40,000 Sami presently live in Norway. There are 17,000 Sami in Sweden, 4,700 in Finland and about 2,000 in the Soviet Union. No population figures yet exist for the number of Sami who now live in the United States and Canada.

Traditionally the Sami way of life has been based on self-sufficient extended-family communities called *siida*. Salmon fishing, whaling, the trapping of beaver and the hunting of reindeer provided the economic base for early siida life and during the 17th century reindeer husbandry was developed throughout all of northern Sápmi. Sami have also specialized in shipbuilding, trade communications and Arctic navigation.

The Sami have been described as peace-loving people who posses the spiritual gifts of clairvoyance and healing. From the time of Norway's King Olaf (1020 A.D.) however, there has been an effort to assimilate and colonize Sápmi by converting the Sami to Christianity. The oldest Christian provincial law codes in eastern Norway prohibit belief in Sami "sorcerers" and forbid travel to Sápmi to cure illnesses. A settlement statute issues by Sweden's King Magnus Eriksson (1340) states that all who became Christian could take Sami land. By 1600 Lutheran missionary work was focused against the *noaidi* (shamans) and the leaders of the siidas, and those who resisted conversion were imprisoned or killed. Sacred articles were stolen and burned.

During the Middle Ages, an ever-increasing Scandinavian need for Sami land and minerals began to seriously effect all aspects of siida life, forcing many Sami to take non-traditional jobs. Wars between Norway and Sweden and disputes in Finland further usurped large portions of Sami land. Taxation by the three countries as the reindeer herds migrated across borders created an immense economic burden and although the *Lapp Codicil* (1751) sought to temper the situation, pressures on Sápmi increased.

cont. page 6

Báiki - the home you always bring along

Harald Gaski

There are many ways to check the meaning of a word. You may look it up in a dictionary and find the precise and often boring academic definition. You may ask your elders to define the word for you, accompanied by a lot of examples clarifying the exact use of the word—or you may simply listen to your heart and feel the meaning.

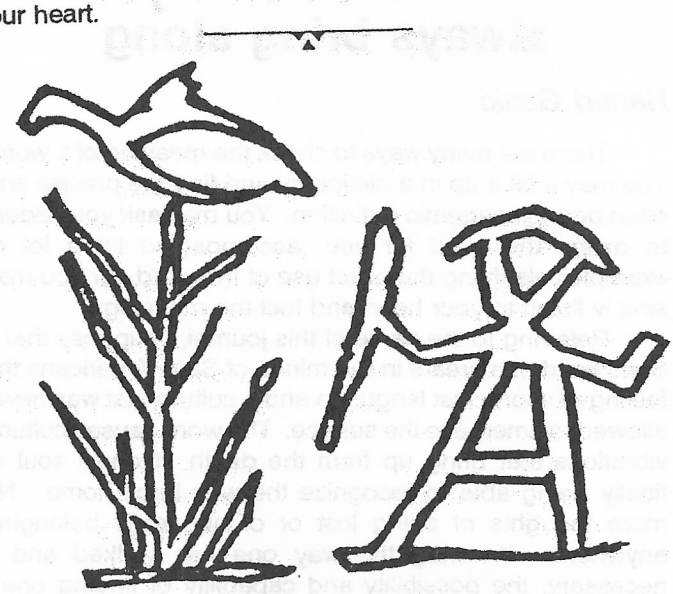
Referring to the name of this journal, I suppose that a Sami word can create in the minds of Sami Americans the feeling of a long lost language and a culture that was never allowed to emerge to the surface. The word causes cultural vibrations that bring up from the depth of one's soul of finally being able to recognize the way back home. No more thoughts of being lost or of not really belonging anywhere. Knowing the way one has walked and if necessary, the possibility and capability of finding one's

way back brings the pieces back to a whole. The underlying culture so important to the personality and behavior suddenly turns into a part of the background you have not been aware of at all. To feel at home wherever you are is wealth derived from the security of knowing who you are.

"My home is my heart/and it moves with me," says the Sami poet Nils-Aslak Valkeapää in one of his most famous lyrics from the book *Ruoktu Váimmus* (My Home is in My Heart), 1985. Valkeapää was awarded the Nordic Council's Literature Prize for 1991, and his home is definitely Samiland—in the Sami language, among his own people. "How do I explain/that my heart is my home/that it follows me/How do I explain/that others live there too/my brothers and my sisters," he asks, extending the narrow meaning of what a home is.

Maybe it is typical for the Sami people to understand the meaning of "home" as a place where there is room for more than just the nuclear family. Maybe it is part of the social and cultural heritage belonging to a people where collectiveness and unity are held in high regard. Traditionally the group was dependent on working together to reach common goals. The hunting of the wild reindeer was a task for the total group of people living in the siida, in the village consisting of more than togetherness in the way tents and huts and houses were being place. You were related to people, and through the relations you became a part of the community; you were "homed" and socialized into the group. You were still an individual, but you were not alone anymore.

There are other terms connected to báiki, such as *báikedoallu*, a household. In the traditional reindeer community this is the smallest autonomous unit forming part of the siida, which is the more formal organization of a community. Báikedoallu covers all the competence needed to manage and survive as a reindeer breeding unit. Thus báiki means both the house that is your home and the place where you live. *Ruoktu*, as it is referred to in Valkeapää's poem, is a synonym for báiki, so it is natural that there is room for other people too, in the home that is your heart.



Colonization

Niillas A. Somby

(excerpt from a paper prepared for the Peace Congress in Kiruna, Sweden, October 1990, permission granted by the author)

Samiland has been under colonizers for over 500 years, and from the beginning of the seventeenth century traditional Sami religion has been prohibited. Many Sami have been killed because they lived the way the traditional religion required. The colonizers called it witchcraft.

Traditional Sami singing, the joik, has also been prohibited. Even today the Christians say that the joik is a serious and great sin. Joiking has been prohibited even at the school in Kautokeino, Norway, which is considered by many to be the capital of Samiland.

The Sami society was based on siidas. The siidas had no desire to own land. They used the land collectively and the different siidas made agreements on land use. Our traditional religion states that nature is sacred and is to be used with respect and honor. To my knowledge this conflicts with the Christian way of thinking, as the Bible states that man is superior to the land and the animals.

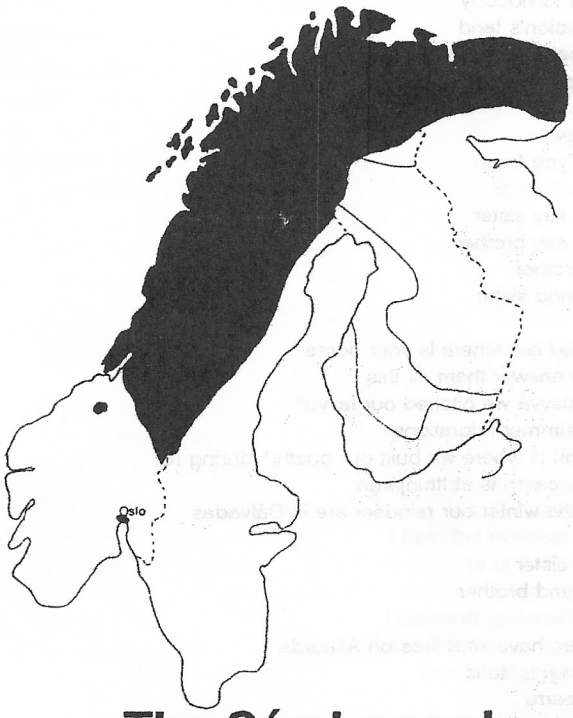
With the appearance of the colonizers the siida system was destroyed. The first big destruction of nature began in the Swedish part of Samiland where the Swedes established the mines in Nasa. Both silver and iron ore was found in the mountains. The Swedes used Sami for labor in the mines and forced them to use their reindeer to bring silver and iron to the coast. Labor agreements were enforced by punishment. If a Sami refused to be a miner the procedure was to take the person to a lake, make some holes in the ice and drag the person between the holes until an agreement was reached. Since those days, many other mines have been started in Samiland, although with different working agreements. Many Sami who had the indigenous religion in their hearts were terrified by the way the strangers treated natu[illegible]e. In some places the mines are on sacred ground.

In the Russian pa[illegible]amiland, in the Kola Peninsula, nature is extremely poll[illegible] Industrial and nuclear waste is threatening the northern part of Europe. Logging has also caused big damage to our people. In 1885 the English-owned North of Europe Land Company was allowed to clear-cut the large Nordland forests in Norway, destroying the Samiland forests on the basis of an agreement with the Norwegian government. Clear-cutting was very destructive to reindeerkeeping, hunting and to all the animals and birds.

If the colonizers had not destroyed our religion in which nature is sacred and precious, they would never have been able to take our natural resources from us. I find that religion is the base of each culture. Religion brings the moral rules which later become the laws and norms in the society. The colonizers knew this and had to destroy our religion in order to occupy our lands and our minds. They know very well that religion keeps the culture of the nation

together. Aboriginal people may lose cultural elements such as language, food and clothing yet these are just external fragments of the culture. but if the base of the culture, the morals and the religion, is lost, the foundation of the culture is lost. And when it is lost there are no longer any basic rules in the nation to make the culture and the way of life survive.

Today many Sami go to schools and become well educated. Although the education is given in the Sami language it is still the colonizer's culture that our children are being taught. If the world is ever to be a peaceful and good place for people, the first condition is that we all accept that we have different lifestyles, cultures and religions. We must never force our own religion, morals, political systems and laws on other people of the world. All the indigenous peoples have one interest. It is the earth, the globe, which has the same importance to all of us. We all live on it. We cannot destroy it with pollution. Each nation should find its own way of protecting nature with their lifestyles, their moral standards and their ethics. Then, and only then, the people of the earth have a future. Our future is not tomorrow. It is here and now.



The Sámi people

An official definition of Sami was adopted in 1980 in Tromsø, Norway, at the Nordic Sami Conference. They stated that any person is Sami who: 1) has Sami as his first language, or whose father, mother or one of whose grandparents has Sami as their first language, or 2) considers himself a Sami and lives entirely according to the rules of the Sami society, and who is recognized by the representative Sami body as a Sami, or 3) has a father or mother who satisfies the above-mentioned conditions for being a Sami.

Editorial

Faith Fjeld

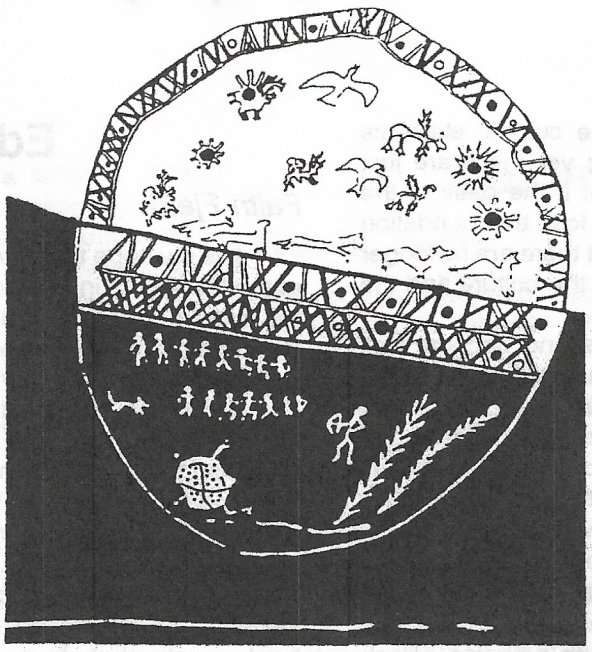
It is my hope that *Báiki* will represent the reawakening of the Sami spirit in America, a spirit that has been dormant for many decades. I believe that the appearance of this journal is proof in black and white that indigenous roots and spiritual connections survive the attempts to destroy them. The clandestine immigration of thousands of our ancestors to America under the guise of being "Norwegian," "Swedish," and "Finnish" has created generations of descendants who Sami identity has either been totally lost, or treated like an amusing family joke to be disclaimed whenever it surfaced. Museums and festivals that feature Scandinavian-American cultures often relegate us to the status of token mascots. Supposedly well-researched books and scholarly papers on Scandinavian-American immigration ignore us completely. By now our numbers must have at least tripled and yet census figures fail to record the Sami presence in America! Nils-Aslak Valkeapää has called us "Europe's forgotten people" but we are America's forgotten people too.

Not knowing who I am and where I am from, it has been difficult for me to "fit in." I am drawn to Indian America but I am not American Indian. I am attracted to the black and Latino cultures of America, but I am not from Africa or Latin America. I have heard that our origin is in Asia, but I am far from the keepers of oral tradition who could tell me if this is true. And so I have sat amongst the Norwegian Americans eating their holiday lutefisk and singing their Lutheran hymns—feeling like a sojourner, personifying the meaning of the word "Lapp." I have allowed myself to be an "outcast" while longing to connect with the Sápmi of my "Norwegian" grandparents and the Sápmi of my own "American" self.

To believe that my indigenous roots died when they were pulled up and transplanted is to ignore the fact that indigenous peoples are always in the process of migration and relocation; mobility and flexibility are integral to the indigenous way of life. To believe that my spiritual connections are limited by time and space is to forget that relationships are circular as the indigenous have always known, not linear as the assimilated seem to think. To believe that I can cease to be Sami is to deny the emotion and yearning that stirs in my Sami-American heart!

So this journal will celebrate the survival of Sami roots and Sami connections. *Báiki* will provide a medium wherein we can define the Sami Way of Life in the 1990s. We will look the world in the eye and declare: "This is who we are, and this is where we are from!" We will provide an opportunity for Sami-American artists, poets and writers to express themselves, and we will offer a place where the artists, poets and writers of Scandinavian and Russian Sápmi can communicate with Sami America.

Together we will come to a new understanding of the Sami word *madii*. Madii is an overgrown path that leaves a trace waiting to be uncovered. I believe that we Sami are about to uncover this path.



Nils-Aslak Valkeapää
(Aillohaś)

MY HOME IS

My home is in my heart
it migrates with me

The joik is alive in my home
the happiness of children is heard there
herd-bells sound there
dogs bark
the lasso hums
In my home
the fluttering edges of coats
the leggings of the Sami girls
warm smiles
My home is my heart
it migrates with me

You know it brother
you understand sister
but what do I say to strangers
who spread out everywhere
how shall I answer their questions
that come from a different world

How can I explain
that one can not live in just one place
and still live
among all these fjelds
You are standing in my bed
my privy is behind the bushes
the sun is my lamp
the lake my wash bowl

How can I explain
that my heart is my home
that it moves with me
How can I explain
that others live there too
my brothers and sisters
What shall I say brother
what shall I say sister

They come
and ask where is your home
they come with papers
and say
this belongs to nobody
this is the Nation's land
everything belongs to the State
They bring out fat dirty books
and say
this is the law
it applies to you too

What shall I say sister
What shall I say brother
You know brother
you understand sister

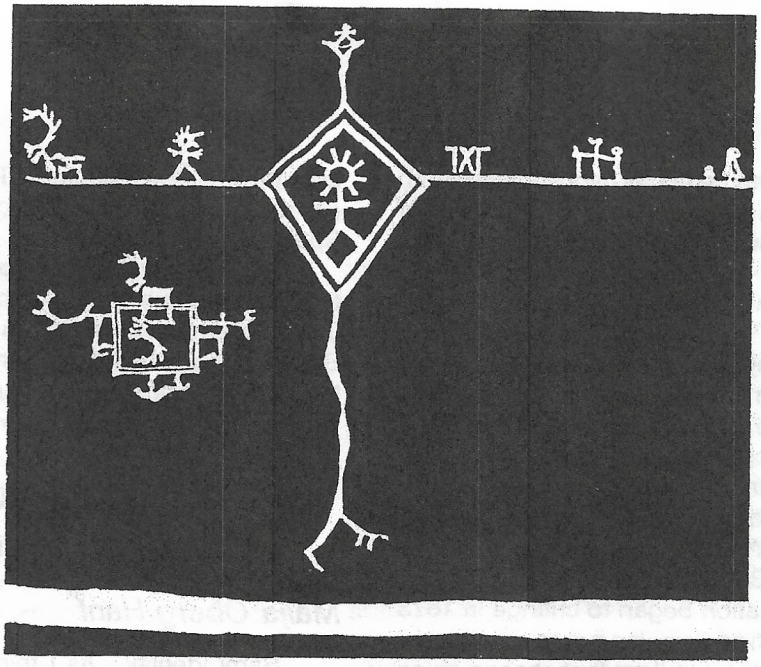
But when they ask where is your home
do you then answer them all this
On Skuolfedievvá we pitched our lavvu*
during the summer migrations
Čáppavuopmi is where we built our goathi* during rut
Our summer camp is at Ittunjárga
and during the winter our reindeer are in Dálvadas

You know it sister
you understand brother

Our ancestors have kept fires on Allaorda
On Stuorajeaggis' tufts
on Viiddesčearru
Grandfather drowned on the fjord while fishing
Grandmother cut her shoe grass in Šelgesrohtu
Father was born in Finjubákti in burning cold

And still they ask
where is your home

They come to me
and show books
Law books
that they have written themselves
This is the law and it applies to you too
See here



IN MY HEART

But I cannot see brother
I cannot see sister
I say nothing
I cannot
I only show them the fjelds

I see our fjelds
the places we live
and hear my heart beat
all of this is my home
and I carry it
within me
in my heart

I can hear it
when I close my eyes
I can hear it

I hear somewhere
deep within me
I hear the ground thunder
from thousands of hooves
I hear the reindeer herd running
or is it the noaidi* drum
and the sacred rock
I discover somewhere within me
I hear it whisper sound shout call
with the thunder still echoing
in my breast

And I can hear it
even when I open my eyes
I can hear it

Somewhere deep within me
I can hear it a voice calling
and the blood's joik* I hear
In the depths
from the dawn of life
to the dusk of life

All of this is my home
these fjords rivers lakes
the cold the sunlight the storms
The night and day of the fjelds
happiness and sorrow
sisters and brothers
All of this is my home

Of course I recognize you
even if you are among others
you are my brother
you are my sister

Of course I recognize you
even if you are not wearing Sami dress
You are my brother
You are my sister

Even though we have never met
I recognize you
and if you wanted to hide
something would still move in your heart

You are my brother
you are my sister
I love you

Editor's note: The words home and heart are interchangeable in the original Sami language. *Lavvu* is a tepee, *goathi* is a hut, *noaidi* is a shaman, *joik* is a traditional singing chant. This is an excerpt from the forthcoming English translation of Valkeapää's first book. The translators Lars Nordstrom and Ralph Salisbury have granted permission to use this portion. The drawings are reproduced by permission of Valkeapää.

Who we are...from page 1

During the 18th and 19th centuries "Norwegianization" and "Swedification" became official government policies. In Norway land ownership was tied to the speaking of Norwegian, and in Swedish-held areas both the Finns and the Sami were made to speak Swedish. Sami children were forcibly removed from their families and placed in distant boarding schools where they were forbidden to speak their language and punished for "acting Sami." Swedish was superior to being a "heathen and primitive Lapp." Since this period of greatest cultural oppression was also the period of greatest emigration from Scandinavia, it seems reasonable to believe that thousands of Sami first became "Norwegians" and "Swedes" and then left Scandinavia to become "Americans" and "Canadians."

Some say that the situation began to change in 1873 with the publication of the first Sami-language newspaper *Muiltalaegje* (The News). Others believe that change came with the turn-of-the-century establishment of a Sami organization in Norway (1903), and Swedish legislation (1904) which set aside lands in the north for the preservation of Sami reindeer herding. Albeit limited and paternalistic, these two developments ushered in the slow but steady twentieth-century re-emergence of Sami culture in all of its varied forms.

In the next issue we will outline this re-emergence.

What do we call ourselves

Rudolph Johnson

We call ourselves Americans of course. As citizens of the United States we have American nationality, but this does not define our ethnicity. I think of myself as a Norwegian American of Sami ancestry since I was born in Norway.

We like to call ourselves Sami, but in Norway it might sound a bit pretentious since we don't speak the language, have no reindeer, etc. We are Sami Americans. Some Finnish scholars writing in English use the spelling Saami; they love the double vowel. There is yet no correct spelling and each editor must decide upon usage. The term "Lapp" is very dated, and is considered to be pejorative, in bad taste.

We have been called *fenni*. It was Tacitus, the Roman author or 98 A.D. in his book *Germania* who called us fenni, and this was the first historical reference to us as a people. We were the people farthest north. And Ottar, the Norwegian Viking who lived in north Norway in 800 A.D. called us *finn* as recorded by King Alfred of England. The medieval geographers also called us finn with many variant spellings, such as phennoi, skridfinn, etc. The Icelandic Saga literature also referred to us as finns, and in the north of Norway this term is still used. Now, the people of Finland do not call themselves Finn or their country Finland, which are English terms. They call themselves *Suomalainen* and their country *Suomi*. The Finns call us *samilainen* (*lappalainen*), the Russians call us *lopari*, the French and Spanish call us *lapon*.

In English we prefer to be called Sami (written without the diacritical mark used in the Sami spelling: *Sámi*). I feel that this term can be singular (one Sami), or plural (many Sami), or it can be used as an adjective (the Sami religion). I think of myself as a Sami American.

Sami identity: in a word, *Magic*

Maija Oberg Hanf

Sami identity. As I think of this topic many images come into my head. First, the old traditional pictures seen in *National Geographic* of high-cheeked robust-looking Sami wearing traditional dress, living in tents, running after reindeer and joiking in the hills. Oh, how romantic! But I'm here to tell you: it ain't that way in Samiland today. Sami live in the twentieth century enjoying all the technological advances of modern society. However, one aspect of Sami identity has survived the rigors of cultural assimilation: Sami Magic. It is part of the Sami soul passed on from one generation to the next.

To talk about Sami identity as an American is a very tricky proposition. After all, most of the Sami Americans (Samicans for short) I know are robust-looking high-cheeked individuals who have regular jobs like computer operators, bookstore managers, hardware store clerks, massage therapists (that's me), farmers, carpenters, nurses, actors, etc. Not one of them owns a reindeer and a few would have a hard time with that because they are vegetarians. And to top it all off, all of us have been raised with the notion that we are Norwegian, Finnish, Swedish or Russian like our European grandparents. None of us were taught to say, "I'm a Samilainen." I'd say we have the beginnings of an identity problem here. All is not lost however. There is an old saying that goes like this: "You can take the Samilainen out of Samiland, but you can't take the Sami out of the Samilainen." I say hooray for that! In other words, good try grandpa and grandma, you left Samiland and tried to make a new start in a new world with a new identity and it worked for a generation. But you forgot one thing. You were different when you left Samiland and you will always be different. And so are we, your children and grandchildren. The pressure to assimilate is off and now we meet as Sami experiencing our Sami Magic.

What is "it," this Sami Magic? People call it psychic power, others, intuition. I would call it connection. I think I can best describe it by describing by grandmother and father. They were happiest when they were a part of nature, out in the woods hunting deer, or silently sitting in a boat fishing in the middle of a lake. There they were connected to the creative flow. They had a deep understanding of how life words that was learned as the

intimately observed nature and her ways. They lived on earthtime. A natural pace where there was always enough. Plenty of time for planning, doing, creating, assessing, integrating and celebrating. They responded to challenges with creativity, knowing the solution was in the process, and were confident that the earth would display her abundance and support along the way. Pursuing their passion they experienced Sami magic with joy and ease, connected to their spirituality on a moment to moment basis. They didn't talk about it, they lived it. And in living in the creative flow at such an intimate level there sometimes was a gap between their reality and the modern society around them.

As a Samican I have spent many years knowing I was different and trying to find a way to fit in. I knew I was Finnish, I knew I was Sami and I also knew there was something more. I'd say I was searching for my tribe. The first connection that attracted my attention was with the American Indian community. They affirmed my indigenousness and stirred my Sami blood to start researching my family genealogy. Once I started this project the Magic started and people began to appear in my life on a regular basis. I felt the power of my Sami connection and it scared me at times. But as I met more Sami and we shared our stories I began to feel at peace. I received affirmation about my knowing. I finally fit; I found my tribe. And in the process I discovered the Magic: the connection, the knowing, the earthtime, the silence and the power. It was there all along waiting for the right moment to emerge. What is next? We don't know, but we will move forward living in the Magic.

The Pathfinder video released

Faith Fjeld

The Pathfinder is now available for rental from local video stores. Directed by Sami filmmaker Nils Gaup, it is based on a 13th-century Sami legend and done in the Sami language (with English subtitles). *The Pathfinder* was nominated for the Academy Award's Best Foreign Film of 1989. It can be enjoyed as a spine-tingling adventure thriller set in the spectacular and wild beauty of Norwegian Sápmi, or it can be interpreted as a mystical allegory of the triumph of indigenous people over oppressive barbarians who have forgotten their connections and lost their way. In either case the file is unforgettable and gives Sami Americans the chance to hear both the joik and the language of their grandparents. *The Pathfinder* stars Mikel Gaup, with Nils Utsi, Helgi Skulason and Sara Marit Gaup. Music is my Marius Müller, Kjetil Bjerkestrand and Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, who also appears in the film as the leader of the siida. Nils Gaup has just completed the film *Shipwrecked* for Walt Disney Productions.

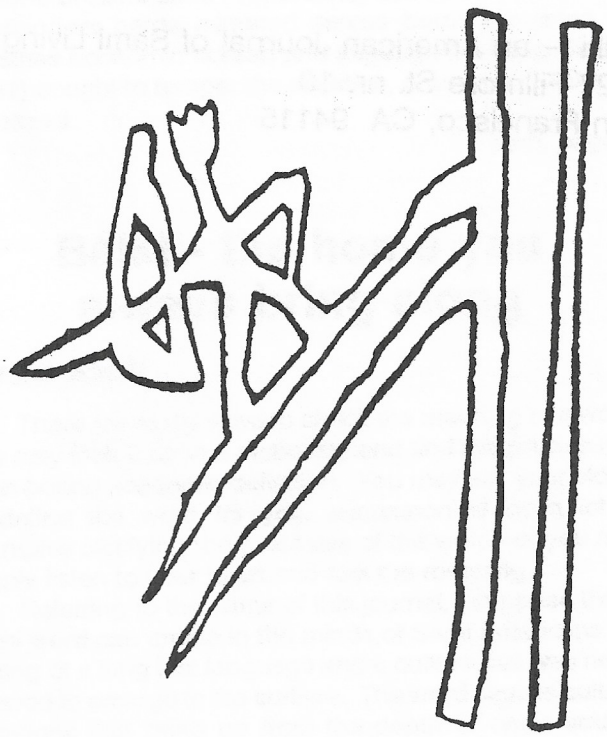
My Sami grandmother

Cynthia Balto Huntington

Someone asked me once why I feel a connection with the Sami. The first thing that came to my mind's eye, while my body filled with love, was my grandmother's face and her beautiful green eyes. When I look into her eyes I know the world will be okay because there is so much love there. It has always been important for grandma to tell me where we come from, since I listen. So I will tell the little things that mean so much to the heart.

Sometimes when I look into the clear soft green eyes of my grandma I see a clear, strong flowing river. Other times I hear roaring thunder. I know why they named her May because she is very much like spring: colorful and abundant (not just because she had six children). she has the softest skin my fingertips have touched. One night when Grandma wasn't well, and while I was massaging her feet, I asked her if she accomplished what she wanted in life. She said, "Yes." She said her family is what matters to her and this has nothing to do with material objects. "It's just the love we have and share." We are a part of her and it is part of us. One day I will be a grandma and I will love my grandchildren like my grandma loves me.

Now that I am beginning to meet other people who are Sami I sometimes cry because they remind me of her. Something inside of me is moved because they look like my grandma and it seems as though my family has begun to grow incredibly large.



In this issue

Faith Fjeld: San Francisco, California, artist, writer and lecturer, is currently writing a book on the Sami presence in America.

Harald Gaski: Tana, Norway, associate professor of Sami language and literature at the University of Tromsø, is the author of numerous articles on Sami culture as well as the book *Guhkkin Nuppi Bealdi Abi* (Letters from America).

Maija Oberg Hanf: Bayport, Minnesota, writer and humorist, will begin a column in the next issue of *Báiki*. She says she knows she is Sami because she has lived in places of natural beauty and mosquitos all her life.

Cynthia Balto Huntington: Oakland, California, student, has been learning Sami traditions from her grandmother May since she was four years old.

Rudolph Johnson: Duluth, Minnesota, retired director of the University of Minnesota, Duluth, library, is the author of his family saga *Lapland Ancestry*.

Niillas A. Somby: Sirma, Norway, journalist, photographer and political activist, has devoted his life to the restoration of Sami spiritual tradition.

Nils-Aslak Valkeapää: Karesuvanto, Finland, musician, writer, artist and poet, travels extensively as cultural representative of the Sami people. He is the recipient of the Nordic Council's 1991 Literature Prize.

We welcome letters to the editor and unsolicited manuscripts in Finnish, Russian, Sami and Scandinavian.

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