

An educator's education

The Scholarships Fund Pool for Low-Income Countries makes it possible for a school administrator to return to the classroom.

by **Julie A. Jacob**

Katrin Raie received the Christmas present of her dreams two years ago. She still remembers the date, 21 December 2002, when she opened the letter informing her that she had been granted a \$25,000 Ambassadorial Scholarship

from The Rotary Foundation of RI to study comparative education in the United States.

"I went wild," recalls Raie, her blues sparkling as she describes the moment. "I screamed. I literally went wild. I still have goose bumps when I think of it." Studying in the United States had been a longtime dream for the 38-year-old, an assistant superintendent at the Vanalinna Hariduskollegium Collegium Educationis Revaliae, an experimental school in Estonia's capital, Tallinn.

Although it meant a year away from her job and from her husband and three children, ages 12, 14, and 15, Raie jumped at the chance. Not only would she be able to expand her own knowledge of educational systems and reform strategies, she'd also gain skills and perspectives that she could eventually share with other administrators and policy makers back in Estonia.

Raie is now a top student in Loyola University's Master of Arts program in Cultural and Educational Policy

Studies, majoring in comparative and international education. Her studies at the Chicago university are possible because of the Scholarships Fund Pool for Low-Income Countries, which provides up to 20 scholarships annually for students from developing nations. Scholarships drawn from the pool are awarded on a world-competitive basis, and candidates from low-income countries are eligible to apply regardless of whether their district contributes to the fund or not. Because any district can allocate a portion of contributions made to its District Designated Fund (DDF) to the pool, donations from Rotarians the world over support scholars like Raie.

Though she now benefits from one of its most established educational programs, Raie hadn't even heard of The Rotary Foundation of RI until a few years ago. She learned about Rotary and the Foundation from Sister Mary Vénard, an American nun who taught school in Helsinki before retiring and moving to Estonia, and one of Vénard's former students, Inge Fox-

Jones. Vénard, now 81, teaches at Raie's school and tirelessly works on social service projects. Fox-Jones is a member of the Rotary Club of Denver Southeast. In 1998, the two helped launch an effort to provide equipment for children with disabilities who attend the Vanalinna Hariduskollegium. The project, supported by the Denver Southeast club and the Rotary Club of Nõmme-Tallinn, supplied the school with an automated wheelchair lift and computer Braille equipment.

With grant funding from The Rotary Foundation and additional support from Project C.U.R.E., a Colorado-based nonprofit that works to distribute needed medical surplus worldwide, the clubs have provided supplies to a hospital, a school for the disabled, and retirement centers in Estonia. Raie helps by receiving and delivering donations. Fox-Jones, former international service chair of the Denver Southeast club, calls her a "very important and necessary part of our work."



A SCHOLARSHIP PUT MORE KNOWLEDGE WITHIN KATRIN RAIE'S REACH.

OPPOSITE PAGE:
RAIE ON CAMPUS
WITH ROTARIAN
JACK HEDRICH AND IN
THE CLASSROOM.

During the summer of 2002, when Fox-Jones was visiting Estonia in connection with the project, Raie mentioned her dream of studying in the United States. Fox-Jones suggested that she apply for an Ambassadorial Scholarship. Not two years later, Raie was off to Chicago.

Nõmme-Tallinn, the same Rotary club that has supported Raie's school in Estonia, serves as her sponsor club. The Rotary Club of Chicago is her host club in the United States, and Chicago Rotarian Jack Hedrich and his wife, June, are her local guides. Raie stayed with the Hedrichs while she hunted for an apartment, and they taught her the ropes of big-city life. Jack calls Raie his "adopted Estonian daughter."

"She exceeds any expectations that I had," he says. "I would be delighted to host more Ambassadorial Scholars." Raie, for her part, can't get enough of Rotary. She eagerly accepts all invitations to speak at club meetings, even flying to Colorado to address Denver Southeast Rotarians.

"I love going to all these Rotary meetings," says Raie. "First to say

grams," she explains. "This is the best place, the birthplace of Rotary. I didn't know that when I applied to Loyola. Aren't I lucky?"

Despite her grueling academic schedule, Raie finds time to explore the city. Estonian friends in Chicago gave her a bicycle, and she loves riding it along the lakefront. The city's size amazes her. Estonia is small, about twice the size of Vermont, with a population of about 1.4 million. Raie says a person can drive from one end of Estonia to the other in a few hours. In Chicago, it can take hours just to get to the other side of town.

"Tallinn is a medieval city, built in the 12th century. It's tiny. Small. Narrow. Chicago is so different. It's huge," says Raie, noting she will never forget her first view of the skyline.

At Loyola, Raie appreciates the cooperative relationship between students and professors. "It reminds me of schools in ancient Greece or Rome that have the scholar and disciples," she says. "It's the true essence of academic. It really is outstanding."

Erwin H. Epstein, a professor of cultural and educational policy studies,



left a favorable impression. "Couldn't you have them send us a few more like her?" he asks.

Shaping change

WHEN RAIE completes her studies at Loyola, she hopes to use her knowledge to improve her country's educational system. She says Estonia's schools, funded by the government, are good — especially for talented children. Still, she believes more can be done for students with disabilities (her own school's mainstreaming efforts are unusual in Estonia) and to help children cope with problems.

"Schools have to function more like social activities," she says, her voice warm with enthusiasm as she explains her philosophy of education. "If you are a devoted teacher, you care about the children. The child brings (to school) the grandfather's sickness, the

"This is an adventure, and I am only partway through. Who knows what the road will bring." — Katrin Raie

thank you ... because it is really fabulous ... and to tell them as much as I can about my country."

Living large

RAIE LOVES Chicago and Loyola, and she feels fortunate to be living in a city with such strong ties to Rotary — even though she hadn't planned it that way.

"My sponsor club asked me to learn more about all kinds of educational programs and Rotary pro-

grams," she explains. "This is the best place, the birthplace of Rotary. I didn't know that when I applied to Loyola. Aren't I lucky?"

taught a seminar Raie took last semester on comparative perspectives on school choice. He says she was a model student who contributed her experiences as an educator in Estonia.

"It was amazing to observe how well and quickly she absorbed everything thrown at her in the course, especially in view of her being from another country with a different language and educational structure," says Epstein, whose first encounter with an Ambassadorial Scholar clearly



JUNE AND JACK HEDRICH
(LEFT AND CENTER)
HELPED RAIE ADJUST
TO LIFE IN THE BIG CITY.

parents' divorce, the father losing a job. We try to help the child there, instead of sending him to a different place."

Government reforms allowing more flexibility in curriculums and enabling parents to use vouchers to choose their children's schools will take effect in January. Raie supports the changes, saying education is crucial because people are her country's best resource. "We don't have oil; we don't have gold. It's human brains."

This is an exciting time for Estonia, says Raie. In the 13 years since it became independent from the Soviet Union in 1991, the country has been transformed. It recently joined the European Union and NATO. "I've lived history," she says simply. "It has changed completely. It is hard for the older people because their world sort

of collapsed. But, of course, everyone who is young enough to take advantage of it

is really applauding. The country is growing so fast."

When she returns from Chicago, Raie will be even better prepared to contribute to that growth. The scholarship is a dream come true, she repeats again and again.

"I will definitely not forget Rotary," she says. "This is an adventure, and I am only partway through. Who knows what the road will bring." ■

Julie A. Jacob is a freelance writer based in Chicago.

«More on the Web»

Read how another Foundation Educational Program of the Foundation, Group Study Exchange, affected an Egyptian doctor's life and career, later this month at www.rotary.org/newsroom.

Educating for peace

Now, perhaps more than ever, the world needs leaders and scholars who can help navigate the complexities of conflict – and sometimes prevent it. Enter the Rotary Centers for International Studies in peace and conflict resolution. Established in 1999 to advance knowledge of issues related to peace and goodwill, causes of conflict, and world understanding, the Rotary Centers are designed to educate capable leaders who will go on to work in peace-building fields. Each year, Rotary selects up to 70 scholars to study at one of seven Rotary centers worldwide. The candidates pursue two-year master's-level degree programs in conflict resolution, peace studies, and international relations, using the break between years of study to gain field experience.

The first class of Rotary World Peace Scholars, a diverse and highly qualified group representing 28 different countries and together speaking more than 41 languages, began their studies in 2002 and graduated in 2004. They are now working to further peace and understanding around the world as policymakers, field workers, and educators.

Support peace The Rotary Foundation Trustees provide for administration of the Rotary Centers,

but program funding depends solely on the generosity of Rotarians worldwide. US\$70.9 million is needed to endow the Rotary Centers, and as of the end of the 2003-04 Rotary year, approximately \$7.9 million had been gifted and committed. Rotarians can continue to support the Rotary World Peace Scholars and Rotary Centers through their district and through individual contributions.

District support All districts are encouraged to allocate money from their District Designated Fund (DDF) to support Rotary World Peace Scholars. Any district that commits US\$25,000 per year or US\$50,000 every other year to support a Rotary World Peace Scholar at one of the seven centers will be known as a Rotary Centers Peacebuilder District.

Individual support Rotarians can support the Rotary Centers by establishing an endowed fund – a restricted gift to the Permanent Fund, the Foundation's endowment. Other gifting opportunities are also available.



More on the Web

Read how two members of the 2002-04 class of Rotary World Peace Scholars contributed to peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina at www.rotary.org/newsroom.

For more information

about contributing to the Rotary Centers, e-mail gibsonj@rotaryintl.org.