THE LINDFORS LEGACY

By Tommy Flanagan

FFN owes its success to decades of dedicated individuals. Pertti Lindfors was one of these people. He passed away in November 2022 in his native San Francisco at age 99, but the Lindfors legacy lives strong in the memories of his family and FFN, and through the P.J.C. Lindfors Legal Scholarship. I had the honor of speaking with his daughter, Karen Lindfors, about her father.

Patriotism, his love of his Finnish culture and education defined Pertti. His father, Jarl, came to the United States in the early 1900s and became a naturalized citizen in Nome, Alaska. Both of his parents were Finnish-Americans; being Finnish was nothing to shy away from in the Lindfors family. When he was nine years old, his mother took Pertti and his siblings to Finland, where they lived for a couple of years. In that time, Pertti learned the language and connected to the culture in a way that would become a part of who he was throughout his life.

Karen explained how much the U.S. meant to her father, and that service and education were central to Pertti’s character. After graduating high school in Alameda, California, he began his college studies at Cal Berkeley. WWII interrupted, and Pertti was called into service. After finishing his law degree, he answered the call to service again in 1953 and was the CIA chief of station in Matsu, an island between Taiwan and China. His service also included 20 years in the Army reserves.

Pertti served Finland, too. In 1956, he returned to California to start his law practice, and the following year became Honorary Vice-Consul of Finland in San Francisco, gradually taking over for his father, who served as Consul for 40 years. Karen recounted one of her father’s most memorable moments in that role came when he planned the San Francisco visit and dinner for President Urho Kekkonen in 1961. A young child then, Karen remembers that visit.

Several of the Nordic consulates in the Bay Area enlisted Pertti as their attorney, and it was a role he performed with pride. He had special memories of Thorvald Stoltenberg, the Norwegian Vice-Consul in the early 1960s, and watching his son, Jens, run along the beach. Karen noted with a smile her father’s comment about those memories when one day they saw Jens Stoltenberg, now Secretary General of NATO, on TV. She can only imagine how excited Pertti would have been to see Finland, a country he loved so deeply, join NATO.

Pertti also served Finlandia Foundation National, on the board of trustees from 1962-82, and by starting and endowing the Lindfors legal scholarship through FFN. Karen reverently remembers that education was central to her father. By establishing this scholarship fund, Pertti gave back in the name of both his Finnish-American and his educational legacies by creating academic connections with Finland for the next generation.

FFN is thankful for Pertti and his decades of contributions to his country, to his family, to Finland and to this organization. We remember him fondly.