

2007 Vana Tallinn Trophy Trip Report

Short Version:

The 2007 Vana Tallinn Trophy was held May 19, 2007, at the Linnahall rink in Tallinn, Estonia.
<http://www.linnahall.ee/>

I won the Silver IV-V Freeskate event. For those of you not in the know of Adult Skating, that is an event with the competitors over 45 with the highest jump being an Axel. There were 4 skaters in my group. The scores can be viewed here: <http://tsukiyo.planet.ee/VTT2007/1/SEG005.HTM>

I hit all the jumps in the program, but didn't have the best time with the spins. What's funny is that during the last two weeks of practice, it had been the exact opposite.

I have the video of the event at: <http://www.gerfsc.com/videos.htm>

I have some photos of the trip at:

<http://rlichtefeld.sk8rland.com/pictures/index.php?s=2007%2FTallinn-Helsinki-Stockholm>

Medium Version:

We left Atlanta on May 16 and arrived in Tallinn, Estonia at 11:00pm on May 17. Estonia is 7 hours ahead of Atlanta. Weather was fantastic all the days we were there in Europe. We actually took too many warm clothes and not enough short sleeves, etc.

I had an hour of practice ice on Friday afternoon and then the Draw Party at 6:00pm. There were about 60 skaters this year, from 8 different countries.

Results: <http://tsukiyo.planet.ee/VTT2007/>

Saturday, the competition started at 11:15, and I skated at about 1:00pm. The award ceremony was about 7:00pm, with all of us on the ice, and the President of their federation presenting the medals. Also, each of us was awarded a bottle of Vana Tallinn, the national liqueur. First place got a large bottle!

We stayed in Tallinn until Monday afternoon, when we took a ferry to Helsinki. We stayed there 2 nights, and on the second night we met up with Milla Ihalanien and her father Heikki. Milla skated at my rink until this April. Her family is moving back to Finland. Helsinki is really interesting because it is so new. The city was founded about 1917 when Russia, who had just won Finland from Sweden, moved the country's capital from Turku.

On Wednesday afternoon, we boarded a cruise ship for Stockholm. There are 4 cruise ships from 2 companies that go back and forth between Helsinki and Sweden every night, with a short stop in the Åland islands: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%85land>
The fares only cover the cabin and passage, everything else you have to pay for. They have huge buffets, large duty free shops, saunas, gambling, discos, karaoke, etc. Think of spring break for adult Finns and Swedes.

Stockholm is extremely picturesque, at least the part of it we saw in the 6 ½ hours we had there.

After arriving back in Helsinki, we took a ferry back to Tallinn. We met Piret after she finished work on Friday and had dinner at a Russian restaurant. She then took us to a really great place

for dessert. We enjoyed having a little time alone with her. With everyone around during the competition, she is so busy you don't really get to talk with her.

We got back to Atlanta over Memorial Day weekend, which was great, because it gave us a couple of days to recover and get used to the time change.

Really, really long version:

A little background - I decided to do the competition in April, because my knee had started feeling better. I hadn't been taking lessons since back in May 2006 when I trained for last years Mountain Cup.

My knee had been hurting a lot during all that training, so I decided to give it a rest. It didn't get that much better, so I went to the doctor and he did an MRI and sent me to physical therapy. They determined it was ITB (Ilio-Tibial Band syndrome). It is an injury that happens a lot to long distance runners. They gave me some exercises to do. I really didn't skate much at all, until Christmas time. When I started back skating, the knee was much better, but still had some pain. Everything started out well in the lessons, but during the training my knee starting acting up again. I caught a cold 2 weeks before we left, so training was not going well. When I left, I had the feeling that if I even made it through the program I'd be doing great.

London

Conchita and I flew out of Atlanta on Wednesday, May 16. We had a long layover at Gatwick airport in London. We arrived at 10:00am on Thursday and didn't fly out until 6:00pm. So, I tried the experience of using the free public shower at the airport. The shower is free, but for only 1 pound, they will bring you a towel and a bar of soap. What a deal!

We met up with 3 other skaters (Fiona, Joanne and Axelle) at the Estonian Air check in. Then, the 5 of us slowly made our way through security. The flight to Tallinn was pretty uneventful, except for the partiers in the back of the plane. Evidently, Tallinn is a big place for bachelor parties from England. One cool thing was that even though we were landing at 11:00pm, you could still see the sun setting!

Tallinn

The 5 of us piled in a taxi and made our way to our respective hotels. They were staying at the Reval Express Inn: <http://www.revalinn.com/78871>
Conchita and I stayed at the Meriton Old Town hotel: <http://oth.cma.ee/index.php?lang=eng>

It was a very nice hotel, but our room was a little small. We had a "twin", which meant the room was wide enough for a twin bed, a night stand and another twin bed. Along one wall were the bathroom and the bed. The other wall was the bed, a desk, and a clothes cupboard; however, the location was great. It was very close to the rink, yet still in the Old Town section of Tallinn. All of Old Town is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. <http://wikitravel.org/en/Tallinn>

On Friday, the 7-hour time change made it difficult to get up, but we managed to make it to the included breakfast, which finished at 10:00am. After breakfast, we walked to the Raekoja plats, or Town Hall Square. This is center of the activity of the Old Town. Restaurants and shops ring the large square. And, at this time of year, all of them have outdoor seating. So, it's a great place to grab a table, absorb sunshine and do some people watching. Plus, the Town Hall, with its spire, arches and dragon shaped rainspouts make this square very picturesque. If you have the time, and the knees, climbing to the top of the tower gives a 360-degree view of Old Town.

Just off the square is the Tourist Information office, where I picked up some maps. They have also started the Tallinn Traveler Tent, just across from the office. It is run by young people for young people with the latest info on parties, discos, hostels, etc.

We walked up to Toompea – the highest point in town, and the site of the first castle built there. Now it houses the Parliament building, the Toomkirk, and the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. The last is a beautiful Russian Orthodox cathedral built in the Russian revival style.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Nevsky_Cathedral%2C_Tallinn

We continued to wander around, looking in shops and reacquainting our selves with the town until lunch. We ate at Kompressor, a small restaurant we found last time that serves Estonian pancakes and Russian food. It is located at Rataskaevu 3. Estonian pancakes are hearty things filled with ingredients and folded over like a crepe. We had a ham and cheese pancake and we also shared a bowl of seljanke (Russian Meat Soup). Both were really good. It was served with leib (Estonian dark bread), which was served with most meals in the city.

After lunch, we went to the rink for my practice sessions. The knee was a little “twingy” during the hour, but I was able to run through pretty much all the program, and get used to placing the patterns on the larger rink. (Most rinks in the US are 200’x85’ and are known as NHL sized. Most international rinks are 200’x100’ and are known as Olympic sized.)

After the practice session, Conchita and I went to the harbor to talk to the cruise ship/ferry companies about the Helsinki to Stockholm cruise we were thinking about. Viking had a great deal. We could get a ferry trip from Tallinn to Helsinki, and then do a 2 night cruise to Stockholm, and then a ferry back to Tallinn. The price for all of that was only 1900EEKs, or \$168!!! We talked to Tallink (which now owns Silja) about the same thing, and they were not as helpful. They wanted us to wait until we got to Helsinki to talk to the desk there, so we made a reservation with Viking:

<http://www.vikingline.fi/timetables/prices/cruises/>

With all the running around the harbor, it caused us to arrive a little late at the V&S Wine Bar, for the Draw Party. Joanne had drawn for me, and she drew 4th for me, so I got to skate last. Actually that is what I like, it gives me the ability to skate the whole warm-up and then catch my breath after.

Piret had arranged a dinner at Sisalik, a Mediterranean restaurant, for about 20 of us. The food was good, but because of the size of the group, the service was a bit off.

http://www.ideo.ee/sisalik/pages_en.php?action=view&page_id=1

George and Andrea, our friends from England, flew in Friday night so we waited up for them. They had reservations to stay at the same hotel, but when they arrived, the hotel informed them that didn’t have a room for them the whole stay, so were moving them to another hotel. It was actually an upgrade, and they were going to cover the taxi ride. After, we got that all sorted out, we did have a drink and talked a while before they headed off to the Tallink hotel.

<http://hotels.tallink.com/ee/mainMenu/cityHotel/>

On Saturday morning, after breakfast, George and Andrea met us at our hotel and we walked over to the rink and watched the first few events together. I then had to stretch and change. My

event started around 1:00pm. We had a 6 minute warm-up that went pretty well for me. My knee was feeling pretty good. Not skating too much the previous few days had seemed to help.

When it came time for me to skate, I hit all the jumps in the program, but didn't have the best time with the spins. And, the back 3-turn that starts my footwork sequence didn't quite happen either. However, I made it all the way through the program. They used the new scoring system and were announcing scores after each skater. They put the next group on the ice for their warm-up, and we waited for my scores. Finally they announced my score, 34.35, and my placement – First! I really couldn't believe it. I hadn't really watched the other skaters, so I really had no idea. What a great surprise.

I watched the next group, and then changed. We walked over to Old Town and had a late lunch sitting outside at Troika, a Russian restaurant on the main square: <http://www.troika.ee/>

Conchita and I walked back to the harbor to pay for the cruise we had booked. We had to do it at least 24 hours in advance or the reservation went away. Then, back to the room to change back into my outfit for the awards ceremony.

Luckily, we had arrived back at the rink a little early, because they were starting the awards ceremony early. The ceremony is done on the ice, with the presenters handing you your medal, your Diplom, and a bottle of Vana Tallinn!

After the ceremony, and good byes to a lot of people, we headed back to the room to get ready for dinner. This year, Conchita and I did not go to the dinner arranged by Piret at the Olde Hansa: <http://www.oldehansa.ee/>

We wanted to spend time with George and Andrea, and Conchita is not too fond of game. We met them at the Town Square, where we wandered around till we found something that looked good, and did not have a long wait. We ended up at the Kuldse Notsu Kõrts (Little Piggy Inn) that serves traditional Estonian fare:

http://www.schlossle-hotels.com/st.petersbourg/gastronomy2.php?group_id=36

George and I shared the Sausage Feast. It was very good. We also had Sea Buckthorn schnapps as an aperitif that was excellent.

The next morning, Sunday, we met George and Andrea and walked to the main rail and bus station. We caught the #26 bus to the Estonian Open Air museum at Rocca al Mare.

<http://www.evm.ee/keel/eng/>

The weather was perfect for strolling between the old houses, windmills, watermills, etc. We also spent some time on the beach there looking for “sea glass”, which Andrea really likes. We had lunch at the Kolu Inn on site. We were a bit late, and had gotten in line behind a large group of Finns, so by the time we got to the window to order, they were out of most items. Not knowing what we were really ordering, we ended up getting mashed potatoes, scrambled eggs and red cabbage. Not sure what it exactly was but I thought it was pretty good.

We took the bus back and retired to our hotels. We met back up at the Scotland Yard pub a few hours later. <http://www.scotlandyard.ee/>

It was near their hotel, and they had been doing most of the walking. The pub was really nice and large. We had a couple of drinks and talked for a while. The décor was books, firearms, musical instruments, suits of armor, etc.

For dinner, we had reservations at Balthasars. It is known as a “garlic” restaurant.

<http://www.balthasar.ee>

Conchita and I had tried to get in on our last trip, but they were full. We had our hotel make the reservations on Saturday. Dinner was excellent. This was very high end, and just about everything had garlic in it. George had the garlic soup that was a standout. Conchita and George had the Balthasar’s special dinner. A large steak served on a sizzling skillet. Andrea and I had the lamb chops, which was more modestly sized, and very good. It was definitely a splurge, but worth it.

On Monday morning, we met again and wandered some of the shops in Old Town. Since the weather was so nice, we grabbed a table on the square at Bossanova and had pizzas and beer for lunch. http://www.bossanova.ee/news_eng.html

We then gathered our stuff from the hotel, leaving two of our bags in their left luggage closet. No need to take skates and alcohol with us. We rolled our bags to the harbor and boarded the M/S Rosella at 4:45pm to Helsinki. <http://www.vikingline.fi/onboard/rosella/>

Helsinki

We arrived in Helsinki at 7:45pm and then rolled our way to our hotel. It took about 45 minutes. The hotel was the Omena Hotel in the Kampi district. <http://www.omena.com/frontpage> It had a great price, good location, and large rooms. They hold down prices by not having any staff on site. You make your reservations on the Internet beforehand, and you get a 5 digit code. You use the code to get in the building, get on your floor, and then get into your room. No restaurant. No meeting space. Just nice rooms.

After we dumped our stuff in our room, we walked around a little and decided on a Kebab restaurant right across the street. It looked busy, and happy people were inside. After we ate, we walked up to the Kampi shopping center. With it so light out, there were tons of people on the streets, even though it was about 10:00pm

On Tuesday morning, we got out our trusty Rick Steve’s Scandinavia guidebook and followed his walking tour of the city.

http://travelstore.ricksteves.com/catalog/index.cfm?fuseaction=catalog&parent_id=10

It starts at the City Market, which is at the harbor. We also grabbed breakfast there, since the hotel didn’t have a restaurant. We had a meat pie and an apple filled donut with a hot cocoa and a coffee – traditional Finnish breakfast. There were several restaurants setup in tents with seating and service in the tent and just outside on small tables.

The tour took us to the Senate Square and the Lutheran Cathedral. We also walked along the Esplanade (the park that runs in the middle of the main road in town).

Lunch was in Stockman’s department store. It is Helsinki’s Harrods. It has a grocery, a huge bookstore, clothing, chocolates, coffees, teas, florist, etc. We had bruschetta sandwiches that we ordered from their deli area, where they had tables. Good and a good price. Helsinki is really expensive compared to Tallinn.

After Stockman’s, we walked to the National Museum and the “Church in the Rock”. We sat in the church for a while. It was beautiful, and had really good acoustics. While we were sitting there, a choral group came in and started practicing for a concert. We later found out it was the

choral group and quartet from Anderson College in Indiana. The acoustics of the church made even their practicing sound good.

We made our way back to the hotel to rest. Milla and her father picked us up there and took us out to Espoo, the city next to Helsinki, where they live. It is also the headquarters for Nokia. He drove us out to the site where they are having a home built. I found it fascinating the way it was being built. I had worked residential construction during high school and college. The house was constructed like we would construct a commercial building. The outer walls were 2 layers of concrete block with insulation between the layers. It is going to have in-floor heating, a large spa, and because of their tax laws, lots of storage space. It is situated right next to a park and will have large windows throughout. A really nice design and it will be very energy efficient.

We then went to the main shopping center in Espoo, and had dinner at a restaurant named "Base". Heikki and I had reindeer and Conchita and Milla had chicken pasta. The reindeer medallions were very good. They were both flying back to the US the next morning, so they drove us back to the hotel, so they could get back and finish packing. It was great to see Milla and talk to them about Finland; especially, since they have lived in the US for 6 years, and could compare and contrast things. Milla said everyone from both countries keep asking her "what is different".

The next morning, we took it easy and left the room just a little before noon, which is when the room code would have stopped working. Breakfast was granola bars. We lugged our bags back towards the harbor. We stopped in Stockman's again for a coffee and free Internet. If you bought a drink at their coffee shop, you got 15 minutes on a PC. It was pretty quiet, so we just kept putting in the same code, and kept getting more and more 15 minutes.

We walked down the Esplanade and stopped at a cafe we had noticed the day before. They had salads, with a choice of toppings, and sandwiches. They had outdoor seating, but it was full, so we sat inside. They also had a full restaurant with service in the back. Chita got a salad with olives and tuna. I got a ham and cheese hero. We also had dessert & coffee.

We strolled along the harbor and made our way up to the Uspenski Cathedral. Since we had our luggage, and there were a large number of steps, we took turns going inside. It is a Finnish Orthodox church, so it is similar to a Russian Orthodox, but not quite as ornate.

We made our way to the Viking terminal, where we checked in. They gave us our boarding card, which was also our room key and it had printed on it if you had purchased meals, etc. It also had the amount of duty free items you could purchase. During boarding, you scanned the card, much like you would to board a MARTA train. We had an inside "B4" cabin on deck 6 just outside the sauna on the M/S Gabriella. <http://www.vikingline.fi/onboard/gabriella/>

The cabin wasn't much smaller than our room in Tallinn. Its beds did fold up so you had more room to move around until bedtime. And, it had a couch. The couch folded down and made one of the lower bunks. The towels and bed linens were held in place on the folded bunks by an elastic strap. The cabin also had a small dressing/makeup table and an open closet, behind the door.

The bathroom was about the same as we had in Tallinn and Helsinki. The shower's floor was an inch or two lower than the bathroom floor, and the curtain was pretty high off the floor, so the

bathroom floor got wet, just as in Tallinn and Helsinki. The nice thing on the ship was that they provided a long handled squeegee to pull the water back into the shower. It worked great.

We quickly made our way up to deck 7 where most of the shops and cafes were located. They were playing a piano in the main lobby area, and people were already going into the buffet. The duty free shop and bars wouldn't open until we left port.

On deck 8 we found the Fun Club 8 at the rear of the boat. It had windows across the whole rear, so we plopped ourselves down for a good view of our leaving Helsinki. As the ship started leaving, the bars opened, and we tried a Cloud Nine (made with cloud berries) and a Gabriella.

It didn't take too long and we were in the open ocean without land in sight. We wandered around trying to figure out where to eat dinner. We finally decided on the Viking Buffet (a smorgasbord) at the 8:00-10:00pm seating. Since we had booked so late, they put us on the sunny side of the ship (where it was pretty bright, and a little warm). The food was good, and there was plenty of it. Also, included was beer, red and white wine. The wine was Spanish and was served from a tap, but not too bad. The buffet had several sections: seafood, Mediterranean, Asian, a carving station, salads, cheeses, desserts, etc. There were several types of potatoes, mac and cheese, pastas, etc. There were about 7 types of smoked salmon, and 8 types of herring. I think we tried all of them. They also had roe (caviar) and some nice crackers for it.

After dinner, we wandered up on the deck, and quickly ran to back of the ship. The weather had turned colder and windy while we were eating. We didn't realize that we could open some of the doors and could have gone inside, so we ended up having to run almost all the way back around the ship to go back in at the doors where we went outside. Since we were just in shirtsleeves it was a bit nippy.

The night was pretty uneventful. I woke up when we were docking in the Åland islands about 4:30am. Not too noisy, I just had noticed a change in the ship sounds. Since we were docking about 10:00am, we went to the café and had rolls and coffee. I found a roll that was covered in a cheese/butter cream that tasted very similar to a "butter kuchen" where I grew up. I was very happy.

Stockholm

We disembarked and went into the departure lounge to use the ATM. We had mistakenly assumed that Sweden was also on the euro when we got money out in Helsinki, so we had to withdraw some kroners.

It was about a 15-minute walk to get to the water taxi that we took to the Djurgarden Island, where they have museums and an amusement park. While waiting for the taxi, we looked back and saw our ship, and noticed two huge ships berthed next to it. One was the Silja line's Helsinki to Stockholm cruise ship and the other was the Star Princess. Ours looked like a tugboat between two aircraft carriers. I started calling it our "Little Red Boat".

The Vasa was a huge ship built by the king of Sweden in 1628.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasa_museum It was built to impress his enemies. Essentially, it was the "Air Force One" of its time. The only problem was that it was built so impressively, that it was top heavy and on its maiden voyage it capsized and sunk. They tried to raise it back then but, since it was the largest ship to be built, there was nothing large enough to use to raise it. Some of the items that could be reached were removed, but other than that its location was lost

over the centuries. Then, in the last 1950s, its location was rediscovered. It was raised and floated to its current location, and a museum was built around it. Since the Baltic doesn't have the toredo worms that inhabit most of the other oceans of the world, it was amazingly complete. We spent several hours in the museum and could have spent more. But, since the other cruise ships were in, it was pretty crowded. When we were buying some things in the gift shop, I noticed the check out girl had an American accent so I asked her about it. She had lived in Minnesota for 5 years. And, since Sweden doesn't dub their TV shows, like some other countries like the Netherlands, so they hear American English.

We walked from the museum around the harbor area to Gamla Stan or "Old Town" section. On the map, this looked pretty close, but I think all the walking had started taking its toll. It was a beautiful walk, but a little long. The weather was perfect, and the architecture of the buildings around the harbor was really nice. The area was clean and picturesque. The city of Stockholm is made up of several islands, so lots of water and lots of bridges.

Our lunch consisted of "French Hot Dogs" and ice cream. The hot dogs are sold all over Stockholm by the street vendors. It's a grilled hot dog, or bratwurst, that comes in a couple different sizes, that are slid into a hollowed out baguette. If you want mustard or ketchup, they put that in the hollow before inserting the hot dog. All the signs for these "delicacies" were in English.

Gamla Stan was pretty crowded. This is where most of the cruise passengers go for meals and souvenirs. We found that a couple of the bakeries had what is known in Germany as Mandel Hornchen (Almond Horns). These are some of my favorite cookies so I had to try a few. We also found the Hard Rock Cafe store, and they were having a sale. So, we loaded up with gifts for friends and family.

We walked back to the water and took a seat at the base of one of the statues and people watched for a while. It was such a nice day. After a little rest, we started the trek back to the ship. We passed a number of really nice dockside bars and restaurants. One was filled with couches and settees and was just out in the open. Looked like a great place to sit and visit with friends. We also got to watch the M/S Viking Cinderella ship come into the harbor area and execute a 180-degree turn to get to its berth.

We were both very tired by the time we made it back to the ship. We went to the outside bar at the back of the ship and had a few drinks. It was still a nice day, and we both got a little sun. We got to watch our ship un-dock and move out through Stockholm harbor.

We had read in the Rick Steves' book that the cruise leaving Stockholm was worth the views, so we had a quick dinner in the café, and went back out on deck. This time we wore lots of layers of clothes. We even found a way of getting to the very top of the ship, just behind the bridge. The views were great and we were pretty much all alone. We were following a narrow channel running between lots of small and medium sized islands, with what looked like vacation houses. The islands were covered with trees and rocks and the views were spectacular. This continued for several hours.

Åland Islands

We went back outside about 10:30pm, when we docked at Mariehamn, in the Åland Islands.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%85land>

It was interesting to see them offload and then load the cars, the trucks and the sailboats! The sun was just setting, but there was a nice glow in the west.

=====

Helsinki (again)

We arrived in Helsinki about 9:30am, but since we just had to board a ferry back to Tallinn at 12:30, we didn't rush. We decided to have the big breakfast buffet in the morning. And, it was huge. It had all the breads, eggs, herring, cheese, lunchmeats, etc. that you could think of, (and several we would have never thought of).

Disembarking the boat, we immediately went back into the terminal to check-in for the Tallinn ferry. We had a short wait and then back upstairs to amble back on the boat. The crossing was uneventful, but we did grab a salad and a sandwich and sat in the café.

Tallinn

We arrived in Tallinn about 3:30pm. and wheeled our way over to the Reval Express Inn.

<http://www.revalinn.com/en/reval-inn-tallinn>

It is closet hotel to the harbor, right next to the rink and just outside of Fat Margaret's gate into Old Town. Compared to all of our other rooms on the trip, it was very large. And, we had a nice view of Old Town from our window. We then had to walk back to our first hotel to retrieve our other bags. Along the way, we called Piret and arranged to meet her when she got off of work.

We met her in the Town Square and wandered around until we found something that looked good. She suggested the Klafira Russian restaurant: <http://www.klafira.ee/2>
I had vodka and moose while Conchita went for something a little less exotic. The food was very good and the waitresses were dressed in short dresses and white go-go boots.

Piret then took us to a little wine bar where she liked their cheesecake. A really neat place named "Kolme Näoga Mees". <http://home.infoweb.ee/kolmenaogamees>

We each ordered a serving, and I had a hot cocoa. The cheesecake was excellent and the place was located in a cellar with upholstered "couches" around the pillars and then small tables through out. We had probably walked past this place several times during the week and had never paid it any attention. The entrance is down some steep steps from the street, but it was so interesting. And, the menu looked interesting too. When we go back to Tallinn, we will definitely go back to this place.

We did have one exciting/disturbing thing happen at the wine bar. The restaurant was pretty empty and a very drunk Finn had sat down near us with a glass of wine. I guess he had overheard us speaking English and when we pulled out our wallets to compare driver licenses (Piret's was huge compared to US license), he decided that the only reason I was in Tallinn was to "pick up" women, "like all his friends that go to Bangkok". He assumed that Conchita and Piret were "ladies of the evening" that I was trying to arrange an evening with. He got very angry with me. I was so surprised; I think I just sat there staring at him. Finally, the waitress got him back in his chair, and we were off.

We then walked back to Piret's office. She had left her car there, and she thought she had left my score sheets in her office. She works for an office supply/office furniture company, just

south of Old Town. It was still so bright out and we had never been to this part of Tallinn. We walked past the park where the Russian statue had been removed in April that had sparked a couple of nights of rioting. (Her office had been damaged during the riots.) But, now the park was filled with flowers.

Piret then drove us back to our hotel. We hugged and said our goodbyes. And, thanked her again for her work putting the competition together.

Conchita and I then spent the rest of the evening trying to get all our breakables packed to withstand the baggage handlers. Since we were traveling through Gatwick airport, we would only be allowed one carry-on each. And, our liquids were limited. So we had to check all of our Vana Tallinn. Also, Conchita had purchased some beeswax candles at the outdoor museum and we needed to pack them so that they wouldn't break. We ended up with Conchita's purse inside a soft-sided bag, and me with a very stuffed daypack.

The trip back was pretty uneventful. Taxi got us to the airport on time. And, the transfer at Gatwick went well. However, we had 4 small crying children on the plane home from London, all within 2 rows of us. One, a kicker, was right behind Conchita.

The really good thing is that everything made it OK in the luggage. So, now we have several years supply of Vana Tallin!

Rob Lichtefeld
June 2007