ESKO OIKARINEN

FAR AND WIDE

INSTRUMENT, AMBITION, AND KERTTU

My spouse Kerttu’s initial idea of doing a doctoral research was born on Christmas 1992. In the Christmas Day morning, she told me and our sons, Jaakko and Ilkka, about the innovative dream she had the previous night with her eyes sparkling and great enthusiasm. Heard so sudden, the idea about the health portrait instrument called Me Key seemed quite strange and unfeasible. As I was familiar with Kerttu’s determination, diligence, and modest ambition, I was thinking that the idea could be realizable after all and that it could help health nurses’ work for improving youngsters’ health control. I guess I did encourage her to continue developing the idea as I was still sleepy but I could have ever imagine that the idea would lead into the completion of a doctoral thesis over ten years later.

As I will later describe my spouse’s dissertation process from a close one’s perspective, I implicitly recall Finnish National Poet Eino Leino’s multidimensional and thought-invoking poem Hyvä on hiihtäjän hiihdellä [It is good for a skier to ski].

It is good for a skier to ski, on shimmering snow, as the sky bends brightly – but it is even better to ski when fall-colored tree whistles in the wind, the trail is blocked and snow droves in the sky.

It is good for a skier to ski, with a friend who ploughs the trail – but it is even better to ski alone, plough the trail by himself and alone defy the night.

It is good for a skier to ski, to a certain destination, when a warm stove leads the way – but it is more graceful, more gallant, to ski for him who passes the peculiar phases of happiness not knowing where the right or wrong is.

And it is good for a skier to ski, with delight in his heart, when hope sparkles like a torch in the night – but it is possible to ski dripping with sweat, in deep sorrows, and death by his side. (Transl. by Satu Uusiautti)

This poem also evokes an image about Kerttu’s home district Kainuu, her place of birth, Suomussalmi, and her home village in the middle of hills and backwoods; but most of all, about perseverance and inventiveness typical of people from Kainuu. Compared with the skier’s experiences in the poem, similarly dissertation work has many sides, possibilities, and challenges, loneliness and solidarity, agony and the experiences of success, goal-oriented seeking the right and wrong, and eventually, coming all the way shepherded by delight and hope. That was Kerttu’s
case as well. Hardly, she either knew exactly at the beginning of her work, what she had started. Certain insecurity and the riptide of objectives were on top in her thoughts but her compulsive need and inner drive made her advance her work. This long research period included also her father Toivo’s decease who was important to her and who would have wanted to witness the completion of his only child’s doctoral thesis. The veteran of our wars was called up for his last evening tattoo before the public defence of Kerttu’s doctoral thesis.

MOTIVATION AND SUPPORT

“We have to know in our life what we aspire. Then, we are likely to achieve what we want, as archers who take aim at a distinct target do.” In line with these Aristotle’s wise words, Kerttu knew her goal, the target, which made it possible for the dream come true together with hard work and excellent supervision. The highest academic degree that Kerttu desired was true in the spring 2006.

Kerttu did her research and wrote her doctoral thesis without being on leave for a single day. The work load was huge and during the last few years of her research, she spent almost all her free time with research and writing work. Evenings, weekends, and holidays were spent with intensive working.

Creative work with the doctoral thesis also involved pain and motivational problems partly due to overwhelming work stress and pressures for coping. In those exact moments, she needed support from her Supervisor as well as encouragement, motivating, and spur from her close ones. Every now and then, her belief in the success and completion of her work was tested. If I as the spouse and our sons, Jaakko and Ilkka, for our small part succeeded in motivating and supporting her, we are satisfied even now afterwards, because doing the doctoral research meant so much for Kerttu.

The routines in our everyday life were arranged according to Kerttu’s work schedule. Our life management was naturally easier because our sons had started their own life and moved away from home. I was able to cook, clean, and do the laundry as well. During the last few years of Kerttu’s work with her doctoral thesis, I learned to appreciate Finnish ready meals.

Time-management depended on the agreements inside the family. Dissecting the calendars together was necessary and enhanced harmonious life. Hardly neither one of us would have been satisfied if we had not told until in the morning about the forthcoming happenings and doings for the day. Many problems were avoided because we took up our calendars in time and looked together far in the future, even until several months from that day. This was how we found also time to spend together. Perhaps, it improved the quality of our relationship, increased our intimacy as well as appreciation and respect for each other.

I tried to be persistent with one thing. I insisted Kerttu to have balance between work and rest, exercise and other recreational activities. I did not necessarily succeed in this. Kerttu was riveted by her work and sometimes I was worried about her not having enough time for rest, exercise, and recreation.