

## Estonia: 2001 Meeting of the International Society for Shamanistic Research

*Bill Brunton*

Every two years there is a meeting of the ISSR, an organization of scholars whose focus of study is shamanism. I have had the privilege of representing the Foundation at several of this organization's meetings. Meeting sites have included such places as Korea, Siberia, Hungary, Japan, France, and Mongolia. This year Estonia, a small Baltic Republic, hosted the conference.

### Finding Our Way

Winging my way to this former captive member of the Soviet Empire, I wondered what new discoveries I would make about this northern region and its people. I wondered if I would meet my traveling companion and fellow FSS representative, John Lawrence, in Amsterdam, or whether his already delayed flight would leave us to meet in Helsinki, Finland or Tallinn, the capitol city of Estonia. I wondered also if there were shamans left in Estonia, for the Lutherans and Russian Orthodox Catholics were listed as major faiths in the country. This, along with the Soviet influence, made it unlikely. But, who knows? Shamans are resilient!

John's flight from Seattle arrived in Amsterdam in time for us to be on the same flight to Helsinki. There, we boarded a propjet to Tallinn, a twenty-minute flight—only time for the flight attendants to serve a small container of apple or orange juice. We could have chosen to cross the narrow arm of the Baltic that separates Finland from Estonia by one of the fast ferries that ply these waters every hour, but

the risk of motion sickness overrules such adventures for me.

Setting down in Tallinn, we saw a city, part very old and part very new. There were trees everywhere. We were to learn later that this reflects Estonian culture, which places a high value on trees and other aspects of nature. There also were remnants of the Soviet presence: oppressive concrete apartment buildings showing poor construction and the decay of low maintenance.

The terminal at the airport is new and attractive. I reflected on how similar this is to the one in Budapest I had flown into from Moscow in 1993 following the Tuva expedition. It is obviously part of the restoration commencing after Estonia declared independence from Russia in 1991.

After deplaning, John and I converted some US currency into Estonian Kroons (17 to the dollar) and proceeded to try to locate transportation to the city center where we hoped to find a hotel room for the night. We had arrived a day early in order to minimize jet lag the first day of the conference, but had not arranged a room for that night. A helpful travel agent at the airport phoned several hotels for us, locating a nice one near the old part of the city. This old part is situated on a hill and surrounded by a high wall, a quiet testament to its ancient past. She wrote down the name of the hotel and street where it could be found so we could show it to a bus driver. She told us which bus to catch from the airport, and we were off!

*Entering the Old City of Tallinn,  
one meets its surrounding wall  
and towers. Photo by Bill Brunton.*



We found our hotel with ease, and once ensconced therein, set out to explore the old city. What a marvel! The narrow streets of this walled, 13<sup>th</sup> Century, Hanseatic League city are paved in cobblestones and bordered by many small shops. Open areas sport sidewalk cafes, featuring the cuisines of many parts of the world, from Italian to Tex Mex. It was at one of these open-air eateries that we discovered one of Estonia's art forms: the making of excellent beer. We also discovered the warm hospitality we were to enjoy the rest of our stay in this small country when we tried to decipher a menu. Our waitress found us an English one (we were able to find these in the cities) and described the dishes to us that we guessed we might like. This was to become our regular approach to dining in the country—ask first, eat later. Estonian food is heavy in meats, fish, potatoes, and heavy cream-based sauces. It tastes wonderful, but is not ideal for the heart-healthy approach to which I am accustomed.

The Estonian language is related to Finnish and Hungarian. It is not an Indo-European language. Therefore, the only recognizable words we were able to read were words borrowed from European languages. There were no cognates that I could recognize. At least in this country, not being able to get by in the local language was less our fault than it usually is for Americans abroad.

Walking, talking, and exploring the narrow streets of the old city, John and I became acquainted

first-hand with the charm of Estonia, a charm that extended to the countryside as well. Intermingled with the incredible ancient structures, there were small shops of every kind, including antique stores whose cluttered and musty-smelling shelves were laden with many relics from former periods of Estonian history. Among these were artifacts of the Third Reich and the Soviet period. Selling these to tourists, who carry them far away, may provide some closure to the Estonians who have endured the reality of these oppressive and sad times.

Finally succumbing to the weariness of travel and discovery, we retired to our hotel to gather strength and alertness for the following day when our challenge was to travel by bus to Viljandi, the site of the conference, some 150 km from Tallinn, roughly in the center of the country. Falling asleep was no problem.

In the morning, and every day to follow, we were treated to a typical Scandinavian-styled breakfast, which was included with the room. It was a buffet and always included some kind of herring (in tomato sauce or heavy cream), wonderful breads and rolls, cheese, juice, fruit, and hot and cold cereals.

Finding our way to the bus station was not as easy as the clerk at the hotel desk made it sound. Rather than taking a cab, where we could have perhaps indicated our intended destination, we went by electric trolley, packed like sardines in a can, luggage in hand, with Tallinners on their way to their

everyday destinations. After several stops, trying ever so hard to figure out where we were, we asked a young woman how far it was to the bus station. Speaking English guardedly, she replied that it was the next stop. In a few moments we were there!

We purchased tickets to Viljandi, after thoroughly mispronouncing the name several times (it is pronounced [v'ilyandi]), and went out to Platform 5 to wait for our bus. Waiting there for over an hour (our watches were an hour fast) allowed us to "people watch." One conclusion from this activity was that bus travel is very important for intercity travel in Estonia, as are automobiles.

The trip to Viljandi went without a hitch, except for a herdsman and his dogs guiding a large herd of milk cows across the highway. This took 15 to 20 minutes. No one complained! Construction zones along the highway punctuated our travel, confirming the "two-season" theory for Estonia (winter and construction). Along the way, we saw many small farms with their houses, barns, and other outbuildings. Many of these are made of fieldstone. There are also many forests, identified by name, along the road. They include a mixture of coniferous and deciduous trees, among them pines, firs, aspen, birch, and oak. Everything was green, perhaps reflecting the fact that nearly every day we were there, it rained at least a little.

Viljandi is a small city with a population of around 22,000. It is situated along a narrow lake, which, along with the neighboring hills, gives testimony to the Pleistocene glaciers that once covered the whole area. It sits at an ancient trade intersection between an east-west waterway (part of which is the lake) and a north-south road. The remnants of an ancient, stone castle, or "stronghold," overlooks the lake from atop a steep bluff, and is protected on its "landward" side by several walls and huge, deep trenches, which were dug by hand utilizing forced labor. This once-commanding structure was built on the site of an earlier Estonian wooden stronghold by the Order of the Brethren of the Sword after they conquered and Christianized the area in 1224. When we visited the stronghold ruin, it was set up for a music concert. The surrounding area is one of forest, swamps, streams, and lakes, criss-crossed by a spider

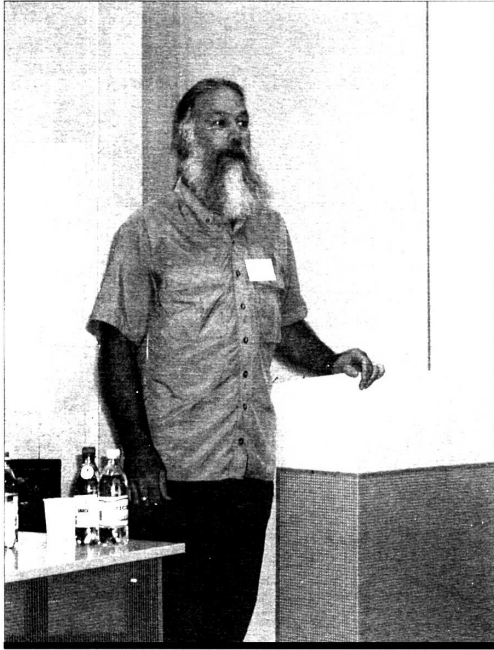
web of gravel and asphalt roads, all well marked with signs.

Arriving in Viljandi on August 11, we were met at the bus and directed to the conference site so we could register and pick up our conference materials. John and I were relieved to unburden ourselves of the 20 copies of the Journal we each had brought with us for distribution (they went like hotcakes). We then found our hotel and dumped our luggage before returning to the conference site. The hotel was situated above a small shopping mall, which included a wonderful supermarket, well stocked with products from all over the world.

## The Conference

The conference was hosted by the Viljandi Cultural College. Attendance was only around 40, so only one meeting room was needed. The small number allowed us to attend every presentation. Scholars were there from Asia, Europe, and North America. After registering, meeting old colleagues, and getting introduced to some new ones, we retired to a local pub for dinner and conversation. This pub is the regular "watering hole" for students of the college and became our haunt nearly every evening we were in Viljandi. It was located several blocks from the college and quite near to the ancient stronghold, with its crumbling walls and impressive "moats."

The plenary address, the first presentation after the meetings were officially opened, was by Jeremy Narby, author of *The Cosmic Serpent*.<sup>1</sup> The significance of his presentation was, for me, twofold. First, the importance of *The Cosmic Serpent* and Narby's ongoing work on shamanism is difficult to overstate. He is asking creatively unconventional questions and reporting answers that are paradigm-shaking.<sup>2</sup> Second, his inclusion at this point in the conference seems to me to reflect a significant shift away from earlier ISSR policy. Narby's findings are based on an *experiential* perspective, gained personally and from the subjective accounts of Indigenous Amazonian people. He is following the dictum that to really "know" something (in this case, shamanism), one must have personal, hands-on experience with it. This is a departure from the sentiment I detected at



*John Lawrence describes his drumming work with "seriously behaviorally disabled" children. Photo by Bill Brunton.*

earlier conferences of the ISSR, where there was little patience for the experiential approach and little interest in studying contemporary Western shamanism, such as Core Shamanism, except to offer criticism relating to its perceived shortcomings. The door was clearly open at this conference, with Narby's presentation and those of others clearly illuminating the shift.

Narby's conclusions, carefully researched and backed by compelling evidence, are that Nature is conscious, organized, and interconnected in profound ways. He finds that indigenous people of the Amazon region have successfully explored the nature of reality and have reached conclusions, some of which are essentially identical to those of our scientists. In some cases, they reached these much earlier than our scientists. He pointed out that they did this by expanding their own consciousness in such a way that they are able to observe aspects of Nature from both microscopic and macroscopic levels. By com-

parison, Westerners rely on external instruments such as microscopes and telescopes to do this, a technological approach appropriate to the style of Western culture. There are, he reported, methodological options to the Western scientific approach for gaining useful knowledge about the Universe in which we live.

The succeeding days of the conference were filled by the presentation of papers. Some of these were descriptive accounts of specific aspects of shamanism found in the remote parts of the world where these scholars conduct research, or in the past. Others were more analytical, interpretive, or methodological. It would not be appropriate to recapitulate all the papers here. They will be published (in English) as a proceeding of the ISSR conference and will be available through that organization. However, several papers caught my attention and probably fall more into the area of interest of practitioners of Core Shamanism.

John Lawrence reported on work he and Susan Kliewera, a public school teacher from Seattle, are doing with "seriously behaviorally disabled" children. Specifically, these children are so wounded that they incessantly "act out" in disruptive and harmful ways. The teacher, in desperation, contacted John to learn if he could work with the children through drumming. John journeyed to learn how to approach this task. He was told to "let his drum do the teaching," adopting a method of drumming for and with the children with little to no instruction. The children spontaneously discovered that they were a part of a community, and had visionary experiences such as meeting with power animals. Over the course of the experiment, the disruptive behaviors of the children decreased and social skills were added. The gains were astonishing to John and Susan, and more work of this kind is slated for the future.

Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer drew on her extensive ethnographic knowledge of Turkic speaking Siberians of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) to illustrate the way shamanism is being featured as a lattice for cultural revitalization, mixed with a new nationalism in post-Soviet Russia. Balzer's treatment of Sakha revitalization is sensitive to the people themselves and to the emerging modern forms of

*Mikk Sarv drums at one of the sacred  
“mountain” sites in Central Estonia.  
Photo by John Lawrence.*



shamanism that have saliency in the contemporary sociocultural world, reflect patterns of innovation, and also reflect factors such as the historical purge of existing shamans by the Soviets.

Paul Firnhaber described the rock art of Barriers Canyon as shamanic metaphor. Firnhaber sees rock art in general as an external projection of subjective realities and experience rather than a simple attempt to depict the external visual reality of the surrounding world. As evidence of this interpretation, he points to certain aspects of the drawings such as zigzag lines and spirals as indicators of neurochemical phenomena in the brain. Philip Nicholson, a colleague of Firnhaber, in his paper, echoed the neurochemical basis for this kind of visual hallucination. Although both papers sounded reductionistic in the sense that they seemed to imply shamanic experience was merely a matter of brain chemistry, both scholars insisted that they had no intent to imply this is the case. Based on several after-hours discussions of their work and ideas, we decided to try to bring together several articles on the subject for a future issue of shamanism.

Merete Demant Jacobsen presented an article based on research she did for a book she has written describing contemporary Western shamanism. Her work is based primarily on experience and interviews with Jonathan Horwitz, an expatriate American and former student of Michael Harner who lives in Denmark and teaches in Europe. What was interesting to me in her presentation, and in conversations with her before and after her paper, was that it

awakened in me an awareness of how scholars have been approaching renascent shamanism such as Core Shamanism. Instead of simply describing its forms and functions, as is done for “tribal” or other traditional forms, scholars often offer a critique based on what they perceive to be lacking in the modern system. In this case, Jacobsen, during her presentation and my conversations with her, in addition to descriptive material, noted that modern Western shamanism does not deal with “evil” and seems to be more about “self-help” or “self-improvement” than healing. I made observations to the contrary in our conversations, for which she was grateful, but I was left with the feeling that someone needs to address these specific issues as well as the more general one

of the felt-need by scholars to criticize renascent forms. The pages of *Shamanism* might be an appropriate place for this discussion.

In a spirited presentation, Jojo Fung from Malaysia argued that shamanism has a potential to be subversive, citing Malaysian insurgency wherein rebel troops are able to “disappear” and remain undetectable to government troops through the help of shamans. He made a point that the shamanic worldview itself is subversive to that of the commercial, material, consumer-driven Capitalist World of global markets and the “commodification” of essentially all things. This last idea fit well with my paper wherein I took a point from one of my professors, Deward E. Walker, Jr., and argued that Native American Medicine Persons (shamans) are the keepers and preservers of a view of the world that runs counter to the linear, compartmentalized, and disconnected one of contemporary Western culture.<sup>3</sup> Further, as keepers of this world, they keep an option open for the rest of us to live in a less predatory way that may promote a greater chance for long term survival. I also echoed Walker’s point that Medicine Persons made a conscious decision to do this.

Peter Knecht, a Swiss born anthropologist who has lived in Japan for many years, gave a paper looking at fieldwork conditions in Northern China (where the FSS expedition to China visited in 1995) and some ethnographic findings concerning shamans found there. It was interesting and rewarding for me that he essentially corroborated our ethnographic findings as reported in *Shamanism*.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the last paper that I would like to highlight is that of Barbara Wilhelmi, a German Protestant minister who looked at the Gospels of Matthew and Mark (and other materials) for evidence of early Christian shamanic practice. She found ample evidence of this, stating that early “Christian leaders were healers and caretakers of the soul.” With shamanic practice so much a part of early Christianity, she wondered, rhetorically, why this aspect of the practice of the early followers of Jesus was later “so vehemently rejected and finally forgotten?”

Videos and slides were shown during the conference. They were detailed and spectacular. They would be of great value to have in the archives of the Foundation.

Of particular interest was Mihály Hoppál’s Presidential address during the last session: the General Assembly of the ISSR. It is in this session that the business of the society is conducted, including the election of officers for the next two years and the decision regarding the location of the next conference. In his address, he drew explicit attention to the fact that the Society had in the past been less than open to all perspectives pertaining to the study of shamanism. He called for a new spirit of inclusiveness, for which he received enthusiastic applause. If adopted, this shift will allow the structuring of future conferences to include sessions where data focusing on contemporary forms of shamanic practice in the West (and other places where nascent forms are found) to be described and their analysis presented. It also means that experiential perspectives may see some light and perhaps begin to influence research and analysis of data relating to shamanic practice, *wherever* they are found. Hoppál was reelected President of the Society. Beijing was chosen as the site for the 2003 conference.

Not all activities at a conference are work. Our Estonian hosts provided several banquets and there were two official parties. One of these, an outdoor barbeque, was held behind the hostel where many of the conference attendees stayed. Under a star-strewn sky, with the smell of a wood fire and searing meat, we dined on the meats, vegetables, and salads prepared from Estonian recipes, while a local musician played one of his several accordions and sang songs with beautiful, but unfamiliar, melodies and words. From time to time, dancers brought a visual element to this exotic scene. I remember reflecting more than once on how lucky I was to be a part of all this. It was like being carried on a swift stream past things of great beauty. On another occasion a young woman from the Cultural College entertained us on an Estonian bagpipe. It was simply enchanting!



*Estonian herbal healer, Laine Roht, sits in her small outdoor shelter. Photo by Bill Brunton.*

### Finding a Healer

Wishing to learn about, and experience first-hand, any authentic Estonian spiritual healing practices that might have survived the Soviet occupation, John and I put the word out early that we would be interested in an excursion to the countryside to meet and work with such a person.

On Tuesday, August 14, during the conference, we got our chance.

Jeremy Narby's interpreter, who had ably translated *The Cosmic Serpent* into Estonian, had been calling around to learn where we might go and whom we might meet. We had originally thought this would happen after the conference during the extra two days we had allowed ourselves before returning home. However, the healer she found, Laine Roht, is very selective and not easy to get to see. She insisted that if we wished to meet with her, we must show up before 2:00 P.M. on the 14<sup>th</sup>. My presentation was

that day, so we arranged to bolt from the conference right after my paper.

John Lawrence, Jeremy Narby, and myself, accompanied by Estonians Mikk Sarv and Jeremy's interpreter, made up the expeditionary force. Driving to the 150 km distant location of the healer's farmhouse was Jeremy's responsibility. He showed us why the Swiss are always on time. Whizzing along the two-lane highway at white-knuckle speeds, we sped past farms, fields, lakes, and forests, passing farm machinery and other slower moving vehicles, usually after fierce braking. Arriving with no time to spare, we drove into the grassy farmyard of the healer, parked, and got out with our gifts of potted plants.

Laine Roht is a thin woman. She was in her 74<sup>th</sup> year when we met her. She greeted us with a shy smile and a handshake, her eyes pools of northern blue. Her hands were smooth and graceful—the hands of a healer, I thought. She wore a scarf over graying hair.

We were led to an open-sided structure, which provided shade and a place to sit. Underneath its roof were a table and some chairs. Sitting opposite us, she asked what we wanted to know. Through our interpreter, we began with questions about how she worked and what she had learned over her years as a healer. Her answers revealed that the midwife who delivered her had seen "marks" on her forehead at her birth, which were the marks of a healer. The midwife only told her of this after her 16th birthday. This, she said, is considered the age of majority. She said she could sometimes see the marks in the mirror, but not always. She also was "given" the responsibility for healing in her area by an older, male healer nearing the end of his career. Healers in



Estonia have a responsibility to pass this obligation/ calling on to another, younger healer. Failure to do this would cause to their deaths, when the time came, to be painful.

We also learned that Laine Rhot had at one time wanted to become a medical doctor. However, she had contracted tuberculosis when she was young and was not allowed to follow this path. Instead, she became a postal carrier, delivering mail on horseback as her “day job.” She actively followed her calling as a healer during this phase of her life too.

Laine Rhot’s healing gift is to know which herbs to use in making an alcohol tincture for a given person’s malady. She does not do a diagnosis. She insisted that she could not do this. When told by a person of his/her illness, she “feels” the affliction in her own body. She then learns which herbs are needed for the tincture, and she knows she has the correct ones when she feels relief in the part of her body that has the empathy with the client. She will only treat someone who has been baptized. She allowed that the whole process was a mystery: a gift. She recognized that she was connected with Nature, but would not or could not elaborate on the nature of this connection. She volunteered that each year the herbs she will need for treatments appear in her yard. She picked and showed us all the herbs she

discussed with us from this grassy area separating the buildings at her farm.

She had accepted us as clients when she invited us to her home. She said that she could tell from a phone conversation whether or not to accept a client. She is not interested in *seeing* people who are merely curious. She wanted to learn of our healing issues. One by one, we spoke to her of our illnesses. She either declined to do anything, saying there was nothing she could do, or advised us to see a medical doctor, or offered the name of the herb(s) that would help the affliction. We were all advised to take the herb *Alchemilla*, which she said was good for the memory.

Reaching the end of the healing session, we thanked her for her time and help and began to take our leave. Abruptly, John asked if we could offer a prayer of healing for *her*. She was visibly moved, tears flowing down her cheeks. John’s eyes also were wet with his tears of compassion. The healer of others was being offered a healing by others! She was gracious in accepting this gift. We held hands in a circle, connecting with each other and inviting the miracle of healing for this precious woman. We spoke soft, caring words.

Following our healing prayer circle, we were invited to the house, where we were shown several



*Jeremy Narby, Bill Brunton, John Lawrence and Mikk Sarv, with healer Laine Rhot. Photo by Jeremy Narby’s interpreter, Inna Feldbach.*





*Picturesque lake leads a Rousseauian flavor to an Estonian "tourist farm." Photo by Bill Brunton.*

cages of chinchillas. On the doorstep outside, we were given a tincture containing 52 herbs. Drinking it released to my senses a "bouquet of Nature." There were so many nuances to this bouquet that it was impossible for me to isolate individual notes. This tincture was "good for whatever ails you," as my grandfather phrased it when I was a little boy. The alcohol was strong, but the overall experience was a good one. Then, a gallon-sized glass jar appeared. It contained about an inch of alcohol on the bottom, in which was coiled a dead snake. The snake, it was explained to us, was a local viper, and was quite poisonous. It had been dropped into the alcohol while still alive, and had perished from its toxic effects. As the snake gave up its life, it spit its venom into the alcohol, we were told. Turning to John, I softly made a vow not to drink from this container if we were offered this new "tincture." Before my unbelieving eyes, sweet little Laine Roht poured a small glassful of the "snake oil" and offered it to John. He knocked it back and returned the glass. Pouring another, I was next handed the glass, and without thinking about it more than a nanosecond or two, followed John's lead. Jeremy was next, drinking it without batting an eye. The effect was astonishing! We all agreed that we felt weak in the knees. There were also warmth and a feeling of well being that is difficult to describe. There was not enough alcohol to account for this and it came upon us very quickly.

Weeks later, Jeremy noted in an e-mail that he "glowed" for at least two weeks after the snake treatment.

We finally did leave, waving goodbye to our healer, surrounded by the plants she uses and knows so very well. I still have a clear visual memory of her standing there, returning our wave of farewell.

Returning to the conference in Viljandi, we were asked where we had gone so suddenly. Hearing of our destination, most wished they could also have gone, but realized that our success required a small group only. Discussions with Estonians about Laine Roht revealed that she is very well known.

### **The Last Days**

The end of a conference is always bittersweet for me. I am usually ready to go home, recharge my batteries, and rejoin my familiar world. However, saying goodbye to people (many of whom are, or have recently become, friends) with whom I have spent a joyous week or more in what is an exotic place to me, makes me a little sad. I try to say goodbye to everyone, but in the flurry of the ending, some are always missed. For John and me, the ending was also another beginning. Mikk Sarv and his wife Marju had volunteered to take us to sacred places and introduce us to family and friends on our last two days. They did this with gusto, putting more than 700 miles on their car on the back roads of rural Estonia.

We were taken to a beautiful stream that flowed past magnificent sandstone banks that we reached after a long walk in a forest. Going into this forest, we entered a natural “gate” that invited us to enter at this point. Mikk explained that they had gone in the wrong way before and then had discovered this gateway. As so many other times, the tone of his explanation was reverential, honoring Nature for providing the way.

Estonia is not a high country; there are no mountains. The whole area was glaciated during the last phase of the Pleistocene (known as the Würm in Europe), leaving a modern landscape of hills and valleys, uplands and lowlands. Any place of height is probably a sacred place. We were taken to several of these. The overview is always breathtaking and one feels the power of Nature. There was for me a sense of the vastness of this northern region and with it, its resiliency. It is always being reshaped by the forces of Nature, but is always the same as well. People live here, but are dwarfed by it. Again and again we would stop along a trail and within a moment a song would come: chants of connection. The Estonian way is to connect with song and we surely felt this many times ourselves, or when Mikk or other Estonians would break into a haunting song they all seemed to know.

We met Mikk’s brother and father at their cabin in the woods at the end of a small road. There was a “smoke sauna” there, and an outhouse. Mikk’s father keeps bees. He made a gift of small jars of his bee’s honey to us before we left. While there, we visited a circle of oak trees on their property. Known locally as *Tammetsõõr*, the circle of 200-year-old oaks is considered sacred, based on what is still known of old ideas and practices. On the West side of the circle there is an opening or “gate.” There is a smaller opening on the East through which the sun shines at the Spring seeding time. The oak circle is said to possess a “field force.” In the old days, a person could enter such a circle only after being cleansed in a sauna. While there, one was not allowed to drink alcohol or use a loud voice.<sup>5</sup>

The first night after the conference we stayed at a “tourist farm.” They are appearing in Estonia, responding to the tourist market. The one where we stayed was a rural farm, which has been converted into a sort of “lodge.” The hosts prepared the meals, which were taken in the main house. There was an open area where one could play lawn games, with a small lake at the foot of a hill where there were a small dock and some boats. We stayed in a sleeping



*The skyline of Tallinn's Old City adds historical flavor to the blue water of the Baltic Sea. Photo by Bill Brunton.*

house, with bathrooms and bedrooms. We were given an evening meal and a breakfast. The whole thing cost \$22 apiece.

Mikk and Marju are practitioners of Core Shamanism. They see it as a way to reconnect with the spiritual roots of their people and their land. John and I were taken to a sacred "mountain" (a high place that was more like a bluff) with members of their drumming circle. We spent time with Nature there and participated in a circle in the woods near the edge of the bluff. We were asked many questions and we taught some techniques. The members of this drumming circle were very eager to learn. Estonians seem eager to reestablish their own Estonian ways after being dominated by the Russians. They want their public institutions to reflect Estonian values. While Lutheran and Russian Orthodox forms of Christianity are officially noted, there seems to be a deeper spiritual root, connected with Nature, trying to find a voice in this new era.

After closing the circle at this last sacred place, we had still to return to Tallinn for our last night before departure. Mikk drove us back to the capitol while Marju used the ever-present cell phone to find us a room. There were no rooms available near the city center where we had stayed on the way in, but she was able to find us one farther out. On the way there, we passed new shopping malls that were indistinguishable from those in the US. When we arrived at the hotel it was easy to see why there were rooms available. It was an older one, and had been built in the Soviet period and in their style. Comfort and aesthetics had not been the driving force behind its design and construction. However, we were tired, and it would have to do. We thanked our wonderful hosts for their time and generosity, unloaded our gear, and walked toward the end of our Estonian adventure.

In the morning we breakfasted in the Scandinavian tradition one last time in the hotel restaurant. We then caught a cab to the airport, arriving two hours before our flight was to depart. We were there

before the check-in desks opened. Our flights home were uneventful, except for John's luggage not getting out of Estonia after he was forced to check his bag due to a full plane departing Tallinn. It still had not caught up with him when he arrived in Seattle. We talked and slept on our way home. My head was full of the positive memories of the conference, Estonia, and the many interesting people we had been with for the ten days we were away. Writing this account brings the memories and feelings back, and, like the "snake oil," gives me a glow all over again.

## Notes

1. An excerpt of this important work is available in *Shamanism*, Vol. 11, No. 1.
2. Narby is confronted with much the same data as other anthropologists (and the same ethnographic opportunities), but, like Harner, asks unconventional questions like, "What if the 'natives' are right?," and, "Are our underlying epistemic assumptions correct?" The result of asking these questions is the calling into question the boundaries of applicability of Western assumptions concerning the nature of reality, thus "shaking" our confidence in that paradigm.
3. Walker 2000
4. Readers are referred to my article (Brunton 1995), and those of Kun Shi (1995), Susan Grimaldi (1995), Larry Peters (1995), and John Lawrence (1995).
5. Material on Estonian customs was gleaned from brochures published in Estonia.

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