

Text by John D. Phillips

It was a few weeks before Christmas in 2003, when we received an email from the Whitby Minor Hockey Association that they were looking for billet families as the Bantam team were short on families that were able to billet the players from Finland. We had at the time a 14-year-old daughter and a 11-year-old son who played rep hockey for Whitby.

We talked it over as a family and decided that we would be able to accommodate one of the players into our home over the Christmas holiday. That particular year, our son's team was not playing in a Christmas tournament, and our schedule was fairly open.

We were given instructions to show up at the Children's Arena in Oshawa on the assigned night to watch the team play and then be introduced to our billet.

So off to Children's arena we went, we were told that our billet was number 15, as my memory serves me. We noticed that he was the captain of the team, which seemed interesting to me.

As I watched the game, it became obvious that our billet was a solid two-way player, who worked hard and was very determined. Honestly, I can't remember the outcome of the game.

Afterwards, we were introduced to our billet, his name was Eetu, he was a fine looking young man with blonde hair. What stood out to us most, was his command of the English language, he spoke perfect English.

As it turned out, his Father was the team Manager, his name was Jarmo.

On the way home Eetu was hungry, so we stopped at Wendy's to get him a hamburger and of course we also stopped at Tim Horton's to buy him a doughnut. It seemed logical, as Tim Horton, was a famous hockey player, who started a donut chain.

My son gave up his room to Eetu, when we got home, we showed Eetu where he could put his equipment to dry out, we sat and chatted for a while, we watched Sportnet News, and I was amazed at how knowledgeable Eetu was about the NHL.

Because of his command of the English language, it didn't take long for Eetu to fit right into our family, he was a kind, humble, soft spoken young man, it was easy to see why he was the captain of the team.

We spent the next four or five days doing everything hockey, watching each of their games, watching the world Junior Championship, going to a Junior A game, all Leaf's games and visiting sporting good shops and generally trying to give Eetu the best hockey experience we possibly could.

On New Years Eve, we asked Eetu if he wanted to have a few of his teammates over for a party, we couldn't fit everyone into our home, so we had to limit the number of players and their parents. It was a tremendously entertaining evening.

The days flew by and we were very sorry to see our Finnish Son, get on the bus to head to the next town.

We have kept in touch over the years and on the 10th Anniversary of the trip, Eetu, brought his Mom, Dad, Sister and Girlfriend back to stay in our home for a week. It too, was a wonderful experience.

We try to keep up via Facebook and we have asked that when/if Eetu decides to get married that his Canadian Family would like to be there to witness our Finnish Son be married.

Who knew, that answering an email to say that we would be able to accommodate one of the Finnish hockey players, that it would have given us so many wonderful memories.