Cedarville Review

Volume 2 Article 1

1999

# Eno and Toivo

Sandra Birmingham
*Cedarville University*

DigitalCommons@Cedarville provides a publication platform for fully open access journals, which means that all articles are available on the Internet to all users immediately upon publication. However, the opinions and sentiments expressed by the authors of articles published in our journals do not necessarily indicate the endorsement or reflect the views of DigitalCommons@Cedarville, the Centennial Library, or Cedarville University and its employees. The authors are solely responsible for the content of their work. Please address questions to dc@cedarville.edu.

Recommended Citation
Birmingham, Sandra (1999) "Eno and Toivo," *Cedarville Review*: Vol. 2 , Article 1.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/cedarvillereview/vol2/iss1/1

# Eno and Toivo

Browse the contents of this issue of *Cedarville Review*.

**Creative Commons License**

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License.

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/cedarvillereview

Part of the Art and Design Commons, Fiction Commons, Nonfiction Commons, Photography Commons, and the Poetry Commons

This fiction is available in Cedarville Review: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/cedarvillereview/vol2/iss1/1

## *Sandra Birmingham*

# Eno and Toivo

During the summer months, Eno and Toivo Kivela farmed the eighty acres that lay behind their house. There was nothing exceptional about that; almost everyone in Mackinac County farmed, and they all grew the same crop — hay, because they all knew that hay was the only thing that would grow well that far up into Michigan. Those that were tempted to try something new were quickly reminded about the "clowns from down state" that had come up in '73 and tried to grow soybeans. They had failed miserably, and since then no one had grown anything but hay.

Eno and Toivo had lived all their lives — more than seventy years — in the same house, on the same farm. Their parents had moved there from Finland and taught them how to be good farmers, and how to be good Finns. Some of the other farmers in Mackinac County laughed because the twins still farmed in their seventies the way they had in their twenties, with a 1941 Farmall tractor, a two-bottom plow, and a wooden mower, but the farmers laughed respectfully because Eno and Toivo worked hard and always lived comfortably.

The twins had never married — but that was not exceptional because there were many men in Mackinac County who had either never met a woman who would have them, or else were too busy on the farm to think about such things. Eno and Toivo had been quite handsome when they were young and probably could have married. They'd had broad shoulders and green eyes, strong, high cheekbones, and smiles that started slowly and spread wide across their faces, and even in their seventies, the twins were not ugly. They were a bit gruff, a fact which most women blamed on their bachelorhood, and most men traced to their Finnish roots, but they were still strong, and the wind and sun had made their skin leathery and thick, but not wrinkled. They hadn't married because they were comfortable living with each other. Toivo did the cooking and Eno cleaned the house. Together they kept up the farm, and it took most of the spring and summer, and part of the fall, but still they had plenty of time to hunt and fish, and they were very happy.

Although the Kivela twins were not exceptional in many ways, they were famous all over the county during the winter. Eno and Toivo had fished together every winter for as long as anyone in Mackinac County could remember, but

somewhere around 1978 people began to notice that the twins always seemed to pull up more fish than anyone else, and they became heroes. They weren't used to the attention, and they pretended to be annoyed in order to cover their embarrassment, but really they liked it and looked forward to winter more than anything else.

They developed a ritual — it was really a celebration, but very ordered so it felt more comfortable (as a rule, Finns are supposed to be reserved). Every December as soon as the ice was spread evenly over Munoscong Bay, Eno and Toivo would pull their fishing shanty out from beside the garage to repair the damage from the year before. Eno would check the inside of the shack to be sure that the floor was sound and the little wood stove was cleaned. Toivo took care of the outside, nailing up any loose flaps of tar paper, and repainting "KIVELA" in bright orange letters on the side. The next morning they would slide their shanty up into the bed of their '75 Ford F-150, hitch their snowmobile on its little trailer to the back of the truck, and they would drive up their narrow driveway, down the dirt road that led to the railroad tracks, past the Co-op Granary, and into town. They stopped at the K&L Cafe to drink their coffee with the boys from the UPS. And they always stopped at Johnston's Bait-n-Tackle to buy minnows and whiskey — and beef jerky, if they had run out — and then they would head for the bay. The sight of the Kivela twins lurching and swaying down Main Street in their rusty, blue truck marked the unofficial beginning of ice-fishing season in the county, and from that day until mid-March, the Munoscong Bay would be littered with shacks and tip-ups of every description.

It was said that Eno had trained himself to hear the pike gliding through the water, and that every day he dragged his shanty over to where the noise was the loudest. The rumor was repeated all over town even though it was clear that every time the twins stopped to chat at the K&L, Eno missed half of the conversation. Some of it may have been instinct, but the truest explanation for their success was that over the years the brothers began to notice that the fish moved with the weather. On warm days, when the top of the ice turned to slush, the fish gathered toward the shore. On colder days, the fish would only bite a few miles out. And on the coldest days, when only the most dedicated fishermen ventured onto the ice, the fish hardly bit at all, and it really didn't matter where you put your shanty, although Eno and Toivo would still catch more than anyone else.

Whenever their blue truck rumbled up to the edge of the bay, the other fishermen would pretend to be busy threading their lures or adjusting their ice augers, and some would stand in groups along the banks of the bay, quietly talking, drinking coffee from long thermoses, but all of them were watching to see where the twins would drag their shanty that day. Once the truck was parked, Toivo would rev up their 1969 Ski-Doo Eland, and Eno would tie a rope from the front of the shanty to the back of the snowmobile, his thick fingers moving quickly in

the cold air. The two acted like they were the only ones there, like they didn't notice that fifty other people were watching their ritual — but they did notice, and they performed for the crowd. When the shanty was hitched up, Eno would walk out onto the ice. He walked on bowed legs, stiffly, carefully, and when he stopped, he pulled off his hat and breathed deeply. The men along the shore forgot to hide their interest and stared as Eno tilted his head back and looked out over the bay. He stood still for just a few seconds, his breath rising white, and then he walked stiffly back, his broad face still and inexpressive. Toivo always met him halfway, and the two would ride out over the ice together, the shanty sliding smoothly behind them on wooden skis. Throughout the day, shanties would pop up around the place where Eno and Toivo stopped, always staying far enough away so a fisherman could claim he had found his spot on his own, and yet keeping close enough to be sure that the Kivela's luck would be shared.

Their shanty was bigger than most of the others on the ice. They had built it themselves out of press board and tar paper, and they made it big because they spent a lot of time on the ice, and they liked to be able to get up and walk around from time to time, inside where it was warm. It was eight feet long and four feet wide. Eno had planned to make the ceiling four feet high—he had had the boards cut and ready to nail on—but Toivo said that the shanty would feel like a coffin if the ceiling was that low, so Eno changed the plan and made the ceiling six feet high instead. After it was done, they both felt like the shanty was perfect.

When Eno and Toivo celebrated their seventy-sixth birthday, it was out on the ice in February, on the 21st. They made their usual stop at Johnston's Bait-n-Tackle to get minnows. Ira Johnston owned the little store, and during ice fishing season,, he opened every morning at four o'clock. When the Kivelas pulled up, he was sitting in a swivel chair with his feet on the counter, the brim of a dirty, camouflage hat pulled low on his forehead. He whittled to keep himself awake on slow mornings, mostly animals and birds, and this morning he was working on the figure of an eagle, with its claws outstretched and its beak wide open, which he planned to put on top of the cash register as a decoration when it was finished. Ira barely looked up when the Kivelas entered. Eno swung an aluminum bucket up next to Ira's feet. "I'll take three dozen minnows," he said.

Ira grunted and pulled his feet down with a thump. "S'posed to be a cold snap comin," Ira said from under the brim of his hat. He pushed his swivel chair over to the dilapidated refrigerator where he stored the bait. "Seems like you'd be comin' back before you could use three dozen, what with the weather and all."

Toivo stuck his head up from behind a shelf of kippered herring. "I guess we know how many we'll be needing," he said, "We'll take three dozen."

Eno nodded in assent. Ira shrugged and counted out the fish. "So, where d'ya think you'll end up today?" Ira tried to sound as if he couldn't care less what the answer was. "North side maybe?" He turned to read the reaction on Eno's face. This kind of information would boost clientele immensely. Eno looked as if he hadn't heard the question and Toivo lumbered up to the counter with four bottles of whiskey, two tins of sardines and a slab of smoked salmon. He looked at Ira through narrowed eyes. "We might go on the North side," he said. Ira pushed his cap up expectantly. Two tiny eyes glittered narrowly from a peaked, white face. "And then again we might not," said Toivo, with a sly smile. He picked up his goods and smiled at Ira at the door, but the shopkeeper had already slumped back onto his chair and was studying his half-carved eagle.

The Kivelas were settled out on the bay by the time the sun came up, and already, other fishermen were setting up around their spot on the ice. Inside their shanty, the twins continued their ritual, although now no one was watching but the two of them. Toivo stoked up the wood stove, while Eno set up the five-gallon pails which they used for chairs. Eno then unpacked the ice auger, stuck the bit through one of the holes in the shanty floor into the ice, and began turning the handle. He hoped the ice was not too thick under them because he had to drill four holes, and he was glad to feel the drill bite into the water after only eight inches. He drilled the holes quickly, throwing the slush outside the shanty, and then the men turned their attention to their fishing poles.

They communicated without speaking most of the time they were on the ice. The less noise the better where ice-fishing was concerned, so they limited their words to an occasional "Pass the minnows," or "Throw a log on, aye?" But after living together so many years, they could read gestures, and they could normally interpret even the slightest change in each other's faces, so the silence was comfortable.

That day they had decided to fish for burbot, a fish that most people threw back because it was ugly, with a face like a catfish, and a body like an eel, slimy and long. Eno and Toivo loved them anyway, both because they put up an exciting fight and because they were delicious — almost like cod. Toivo rummaged through his tackle-box until he found his magic lure, shiny silver, with a barbed treble-hook at the end — the Swedish Pimple was its official name, but Toivo used it in spite of his feelings about the Swedes. He tied it onto the end of his line, and reached for a minnow. He pinched it between his thumb and forefinger just behind the gills and twisted its body off, leaving a trail of innards attached to its head. He then threaded the treble-hook through its head, and dropped the lure and the bait down one of the holes—a burbot's favorite meal.

Eno preferred to use live minnows attached to a red and gold lure. He dangled the dazed fish on a bobber, four inches from the bottom of the bay, jigging the line every so often to remind the cold little thing to move around. He caught

more pike than burbot this way, but he didn't mind.

And so the Kivelas spent the day, sitting contentedly on five-gallon buckets on each end of the shanty, jigging two lines each through four holes, and drinking whiskey in between. They caught a fish or two every hour—a good pace for an ice-fisherman—and they made a game of who caught the most by notching the door jamb once for every fish. Soon there was a good pile of burbot buried in the snow outside the shanty, and two pike. By late afternoon, it was so cold that the fish froze almost immediately after being tossed outside, and by six o'clock, they had stopped biting altogether, though the Kivela's had long since ceased to care. Eno was snoring on his bucket in the corner, and Toivo was smiling happily through a whiskey haze, dressed only in his undershirt, and a pair of blue work pants. He poked Eno with his pole.

"Heyweshouldgoshouldwe?" he asked.

Eno snored. So Toivo leaned back and closed his eyes. Perhaps because of the day, the two had drunk a bit more than they normally did, but Finns were expected to drink, and they were good Finns. They slept on into the night. They slept until they were the only ones left on the ice. They slept until their fire went out. And they never woke up. The Hyvarnin boys drove out from town the next morning and noticed the Kivela's truck parked in the same place it had been the night before, and covered with snow. They were the ones that discovered the twins in their shanty, frozen solid but looking very content, leaning against the wall, Toivo on one side, Eno on the other, a half-used bucket of minnows between them.

Of course, the locals were aghast when they first heard the news, all but Ira Johnston, who said he had known it would happen from the moment they'd ordered their bait the previous morning. There was even a rumor that the Kivela's had planned the whole event. However, most folks dismissed the idea as idle gossip. The funeral was held at the Presbyterian church, where the Kivela's were members, and it was well attended (which would have pleased the twins, although they never would have shown it). Eno and Toivo Kivela are still considered heroes in Mackinac County, and people now talk about their passing without sadness, because having come into the world together, they were lucky enough to leave it in the same way.