

Olavi Nevanlinna
Riemutohtorin puhe 14.6.2024

Herra Rehtori, provosti, dekaani, new doctors and friends of science and technology, mina damer och herrar.

On ilo ja kunnia voida sanoa muutama sana meidän riemutohtorien puolesta.

Let me begin by reminding about time scales: the basic time unit in universities is a quarter of a century, 25 years. To reach the Jubilee level takes thus two units or half of a century.

Our Alma Mater, Teknillinen korkeakoulu, Tekniska högskolan, TKK for short, is now 7 quarters old, counting from the very birth.

It is particularly dear to me as it is the Alma Mater also of two of my sons, my father, my mothers sister, their father and even my mothers grandfather – although by then it was called the Polytechnic Institute. And now under the name Aalto University.

How did Aalto University got her name? Well, in the committee there emerged the proposal that it could be Alvar Aalto University. But I had 3 points:

- first, it would get shortened in practice anyway and somehow.
- Second, Alvar Aalto had two wives whose participation in his achievements should not be underestimated.
- And third, as Aalto University it shall be visible on the top of all alphabetically ordered lists.

So, today Aalto University is about 0.6 units old and it is fair to judge its success first time really in 2035. But already now, if you just walk around in the Campus, the Finnish word riemu is justified. I did not believe around 2006 this to happen. And now you can read about the birth of Aalto University. A book on it was launched two days ago.

Another personal memory.

When TKK was 100 years old as a university, that was 2008, I had the opportunity after the daily ceremony to continue to confer in the evening dinner an extra new doctor, the shy imaginary Teemu Kerppu, to tekniikan tohtori, extra ordinem ioci causa. It is a challenge for the University and for the Student Union to be awake in 2058 when Teemu Kerppu reaches the jubilee level.

In Latin the Jubilee Doctor is usually in the form “doctor jubilaris “ but, in some places they use the expression “doctor semiseculaeris”, half of a century.

But, it sounds like half removed from earthly matters. Suomeksi kai että, hengissä mutta jalat tukevasti irti maasta.

Be it as it may, I shall try to give some advice, as still last year I had a real role of science advisor in a foundation.

So, for those of you who continue outside academia, please keep reminding that people would understand the university time scale, decision makers tend to expect all too quick responses.

And those of you who intend to continue in academia.

Please, leave Aalto.

Even if Aalto would be on the top of all ranking lists and not only on the alphabetic one, leave it – but come back. The spectrum of university practices and values out there is huge. While pursuing your research on your field, do also some orthogonal things. Get friends of your age doing science on different fields. You will notice their value after say 25 years.

Honorary doctors, faculty: you know what are expected. But one point for the those in the faculty who have roles in the university administration.

Please, stop once in a while to have a common moment and ask what of the decisions done during the last two months are going to be of any importance in 25 years.

The grandfather of my mother was a railway engineer.

To the end let me quote a Swedish poet and author Werner Aspenström. In his writing “I första akten borde Hamlet dö” Aspenström has the following lines, translated to Finnish by Pentti Saarikoski:

Täytyykö sen joka istuu junassa
ajatella raiteita pitkin.

There are a lot of crossing rails in Aalto, possibilities to think differently. . Please do it ! Let me propose a toast for our Alma Mater!