



# Celebrating Esko's 60th

Sandi  
Mäki-Soini



Esko was always a blessing to have on the team!

He was easy going, even when we welcomed him with "stretch and slam".

He was always eager to serve the Lord at all times, and I see that continue now as well.

The time we had together in GE was really great.

I enjoyed the Lutheran quiet time.

Your friend for ever!

**Gulleik Vatnebryn**



What fun looking at some old photos! Best wishes to my dear friend Esko! **Lisa McColley**



Dear Esko,

What a long time since we worked together in the GE Team in Austria! There is no memory if you were already part of the team when we joined in 1997, but we do remember your good-bye party 2004 with that wonderful Spanferkel barbecue!

In between there were the yearly week at Snoopies, Christmas and other parties, cleaning days and many, many prayer times. The thing that stands out most in my (Ute) memory is when you asked me to join your future leadership team. I was really stunned! It never happened as things developed very differently. Yes, there were difficult times as well that we experienced together.

Thank you for your friendship throughout all the following years, although contact was only via e-mail. We appreciate that we can and do still pray for one another. Your friendliness, openness and humour have been a blessing many times.

Have a wonderful 60th birthday! God will continue to use you and make you a blessing to many in the next phase of your life. May Jesus provide you with everything you need and bless you abundantly.

**Ute and Edi**



Happy Birthday to you Dear Esko! Welcome to the club! Do not worry, it does not hurt! Sandi asked me to share a story. Well, there are dozens to choose from. Which one will it be? So many great trips we had together. One of the greatest ones was certainly to St. Petersburg. Especially the memory of fueling up the truck by the diesel-mafia boys in the forest, made it a highlight, hahaha! I had never seen you on the edge as then. I enjoyed every moment of it, thinking this is the adventure I love, haha!

Being stuck in the Carpathian Mountains for days was special and memorable too. Countless trips to Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, etc. gave us a rich history. And in many of those, we experienced the Lord's protection, knowingly and unknowingly. Having the ypsy boys banging on the windscreen or hanging on the mirrors, well, we had them all. Even a police guy we had holding on to the mirror. Glad we did not run him over as could have happened.

😊 Doing a few trips with our Frenchie's was a lot of fun too, especially with Guy, his baseball bat and pamper on his head! Priceless!! It was the first voyage with the Blue Mamma. I'm sure you remember the date and time. We had just had dinner at our traditional fuel station, and it was time to change shifts. So, I was sitting in the pilot's seat driving on the M0 around Budapest. It was dark already and raining. I was still getting used to driving the MAN. There was a lot of truck traffic, and I was overtaking on the 2nd line. After a while, I sensed I needed to go back into the column in the first line. Sure enough, a few moments later we saw this little Trabi coming on the second line toward us. If I had stayed there, we would have crushed him under our front axle, or I would have pushed a truck over on the first line.

Thank you, Lord, for that huge protection!! I am still wondering to this day how that horror ghost ride ended for him. As I said, we experienced a lot of angel activities knowingly and unknowingly!

All glory to God! Well, Esko, may the Lord continue to protect and bless you in the next 60 years.

May you grow closer to him, experiencing his faithfulness over and over again.

Be blessed.

**Edwin Keller**



## Stories from the past – Jeske remembers Esko

Esko, Will Sherman and I were traveling with the truck in Czech republic. As we drove, we saw a man on a bike and we needed to overtake him. As we came closer, we saw that the man was naked, and didn't wear anything. Esko asked me: "where does he put his passport?" I couldn't answer this question as I was laughing so much. Then Esko urged me NOT to look in the mirror after passing the man 😊 Esko was a real gentleman during this trip, as he took very good care of me and made sure, nothing happened with me.

Esko, Philipp and I were on a daytrip in Czechoslovakia, looking at warehouses. Philipp and I were dating each other and were sitting in the back (and, as Esko would say: Holding hands etc...) At some point, Esko asked Philipp if he and Philipp could swap places. So Philipp could drive and Esko could sit in the back 😊

September 1991: I had arrived in Korneuburg and was new to the team. During my first week, we (the singles from the team) had been invited by John Fager, to visit him and his wife, use the Sauna and Pool, and enjoy a meal in their home. At some point I found myself sitting with 6 men in the sauna (we were dressed in bathing clothes) and no other ladies there. One of the men was Esko, one other young man was Philipp.

Face2Face in Spain, November 2023: Esko and Sandi arrived at the place in Spain, north of Sevilla, for the F2F course. I was part of the staff and was waiting for all participants to arrive. As Esko stepped out of the car, the first thing he said was: "here is my suitcase, you can put it in our room." The other staff people were a bit amazed about this, I just laughed.

Face2Face in Albania, May 2024: The second week of F2F was at a hotel at the beach in Albania. Esko and Sandi invited me for a coffee to join them (and some others) at a right moment, where I really enjoyed to have some people around. Just a normal thing, but still special to me.

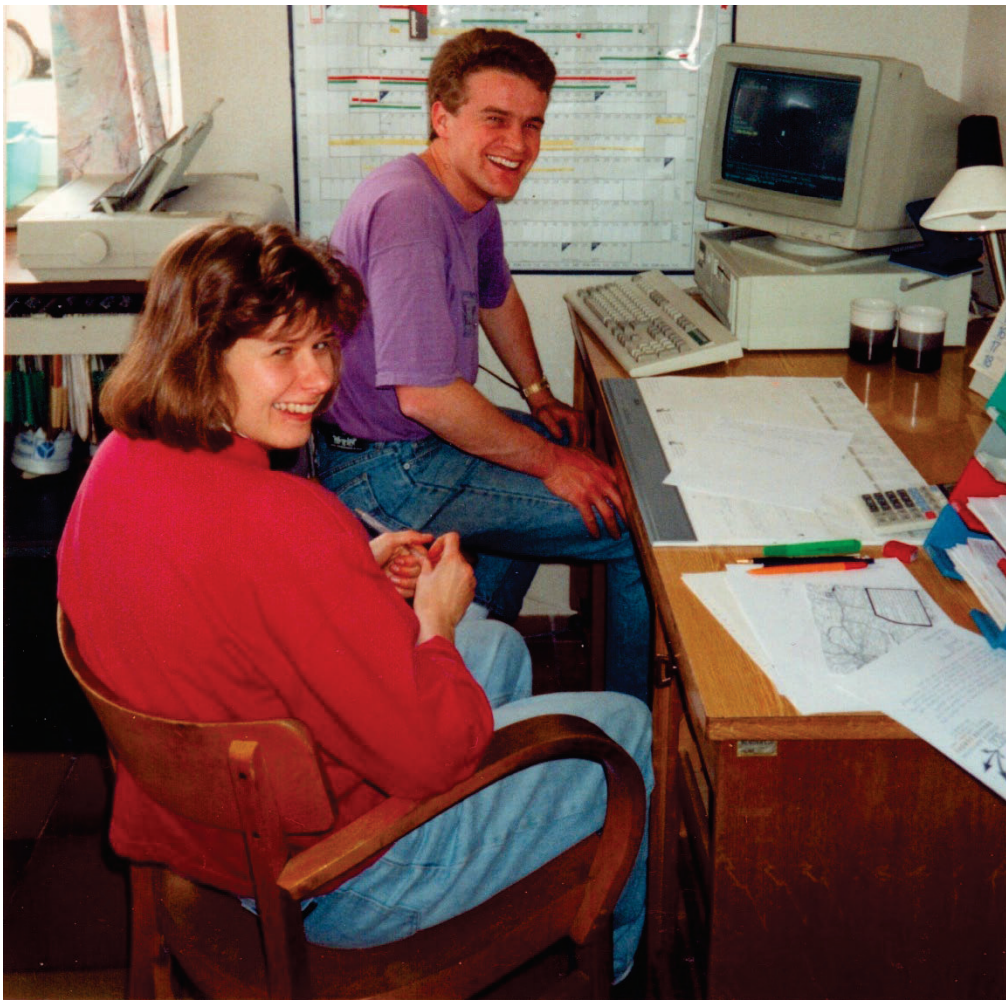
**Jeske**



When we were young... – great memories from a special time with Esko at GE

One book would not be enough to tell all the great memories of our three years we spent together, serving the LORD in Vienna, Austria and Eastern Europe from September 1990 until August 1993. As Mr. Spedition and co-driver, I got to know you Esko very well. You were always eager to be “on the road again”. When you arrived at the border in Nickelsdorf, homebound with your empty truck and trailer, you called me in the office to make sure your next trip was planned and the literature or aid ready to be loaded onto the truck the day after your well-deserved day off.

So as Mr. (and Miss) Spedition, we worked hard to keep you (and us) happy – spending good amounts of “work-time” with Jeske at the desk to be ready for your next trip. And in the rare times of having you with us “at home” with the ‘GE flippers’, we drove to Vienna for Schnitzel at Gasthaus Schmidt or to enjoy Ice Cream. And for those occasions that I was able to accompany you as a 2nd driver to Eastern Europe (or even to Switzerland to pick up the



household goods of Edwin and Hanna), I enjoyed the many deep conversations, prayer times and miracles we experienced together. At one occasion, I drove an old (orange) Mercedes truck from Vienna to Budapest. After picking you up at Hotel Aero (you arrived there from Finland), we continued our journey together to the border of Bors/Oradea.

Our mission was to drop this truck – fully loaded with Christian Literature – at Big John in Cluj and picking up Dr. Bronenmaiers Bus (later called Theja) instead and bring this one back to Austria. Because we had no official import papers for the truck, crossing the border with this truck and its load was a bit scary. After our usual prayer-stop shortly before the border, you asked me to drive the truck over the border. Being a less experienced tripper, I simply drove the vehicle way up to the gate.

The guard asked me about our purpose, opened the gate so that we could park on the other side to do our paperwork. Me being a bit innocent and stupid, assumed he allowed us to enter the country and simply drove on without stopping... Because we unscrewed the number plates after delivering the truck with its load and leaving Romania with another vehicle and number plates, our modern way of smuggling did not cause any troubles for anyone.

Some months later, I wanted to make sure you still trust this young, self-made Mr. Spedition from Switzerland. I decided to seal your bedroom door and mounted together with Rick a real “Plombe” (Mr. Traxelmair from Zollamt Tulln would leave the seal pliers with me) on your door, so that no one could do anything to your scarce but sacred belongings in your room.

Esko, it was such a pleasure to serve our LORD together for those three years at GE. Although we have seen each other only occasionally since then, these memories crafted a deep and lasting friendship for which I’m ever so thankful.

Happy Birthday for your 60th anniversary!

Your friend, **Philip Eschbach**



Dear Esko,

Words fail to describe just how your life has impacted the nations. It has been an honor to know you, work with you and to observe your life. I remember first meeting you and wondering how someone so young was willing to take on a task driving loads to Romania and risking who knows what if they caught you. But in time I learned that you were stepping into your fathers' shoes and several other Godly men from Finland and it was simply the thing you do.

Your faithfulness to the eastern bloc nations over the years has touched the lives of millions, whether through books, or medicine or aid materials.

I have also enjoyed your many writings and applaud you as a writer. Your tales of trips and adventures and the details draw the reader into the actual trip and make you feel like you are there and can experience it as well.

Keep on writing and sharing the things that God has done and especially showing that God will work through just about anyone who trusts in Him and follows in obedience to His calling.

You have a blessed family with Sandi and your kids will one day realize just how important you are in the Kingdom of God.

Many Blessings and many more years I pray for you and Sandi.

**Love from Ann and Creed.**



Dear Esko,

We remember our first times in Finland, seeing you and your family at your farm and sawmill. We remember seeing your home with the big brick stove, the big kitchen table and the long wood supports for the round loaves of bread at the ceiling. What a truly Finnish family and Finnish home. Then your father showed us your sawmill and the work that he and you were doing. Most impressive! Your father showed us the place that he had hidden the Bibles. We had brought more Bibles with us in our van, so we added them to the room. It's amazing how the Lord helped you to see those Bibles getting into Russia. Praise the Lord.

In the 1980's before all the changes of 1990 onward, you drove the truck to Romania. Wow, the way the Lord helped us! Unloading the truck in RO in the middle of the night, closing it up and seeing you driving away. And later hearing the stories of you unloading in Greece. The Lord helped us every step of the way. Then you came to our team in Austria – driving those yellow buses on summer teams and the exciting times of those first years from 1990.

The story of the lost wallet in Hungary – I probably don't remember the whole story, but one of the miracles that I remember you shared about was when you lost your wallet in Hungary. I think you had a breakdown with the truck and as you were working on it, your wallet must have slipped out of your pocket. It had all of your trip money and documents in it. (Was it your passport, driving license and quite a bit of money?)

You didn't realize that it was gone so you drove a way down the road (I don't remember how far but I think it was some kilometers.) and then saw that it was missing. There would be no way to go further without it. But then a Hungarian truck driver came to you, asking if you had lost your wallet! He had found it and saw that it was a Finnish driver and he went looking for you. But how did he find you?! And the truck you were driving was Austrian, not Finnish! Truly amazing miracle!

I remember one time when your mother took me aside and challenged me to help you find a wife – one who loved the Lord and loved the work of the Lord. So, when you began to show interest in Sandi, we were all for it.

Sandi had joined the team in St. Petersburg, and you arranged to visit her there to get some time together. I wondered how a California/Hawaii/American/Italian girl would be able to relate to a Finn and Finnish culture, but it's been great to see



how the Lord has helped you to build a great marriage and family – and you continue to grow and develop yet today. Praise the Lord.

You have always looked for ways to be used to help in evangelism and outreach in Eastern Europe and Russia – literature projects and then there was the book bus. Wow, the Lord has used you so much in bringing that about. You found a great book bus, saw the money raised up (more than once) to fund it, found drivers and have seen it used for years.

Mikael -- See my muffins! The boys of the team were outside. Esko was showing them his muscles and asking the boys to show him their muscles, flexing their biceps to show off. We were visiting the family. Brenda said that Mikael came into the house, running up to his mother and proudly said, while flexing his bicep, “you wanna see my muffins?!” We had such a laugh but watched him show off his “muffins”.

Your faithful ministry over the years. We have seen over the years how the Lord has helped you to get involved in so many different areas of outreach and evangelism – trucks to take aid, the book bus, literature in many countries and ministries, writing your own book, finding ways to help partners in the unregistered church of Russia and Central Asia and then partnering with Sandi in mentoring and pastoral care of teams.

All of these things speak to me of how the Lord has helped you to be a growing person – learning and developing and seeking to be involved in the Lord’s work. Paul wrote that the Lord has prepared the work that we are to do -- beforehand:

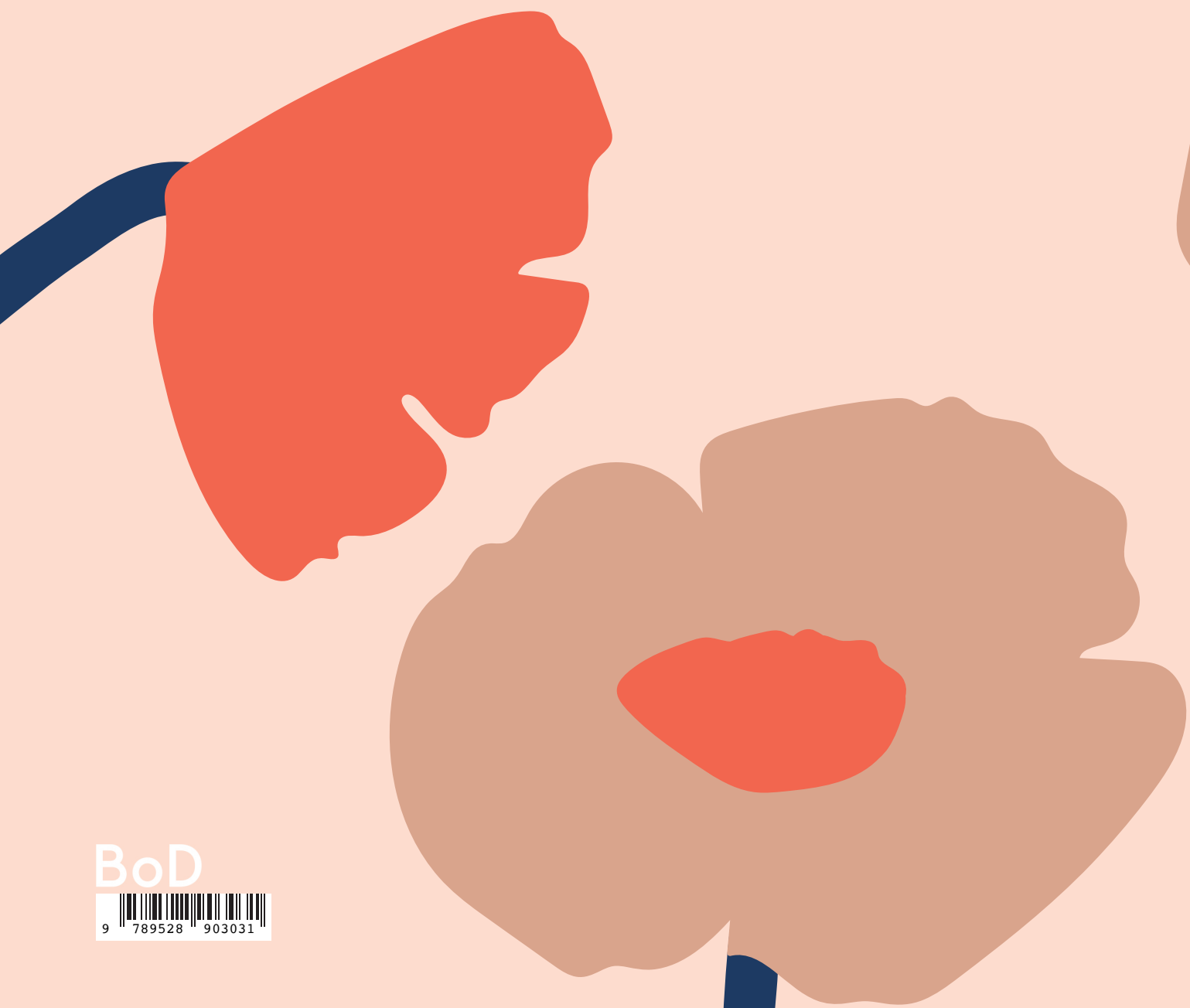
For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10

That is what the Lord is helping you to do. Your parents would be proud of you. And I am thankful for the years of friendship and partnership in ministry that we have had.

**Babs and Brenda**



Esko Mäki-Soini is a 60 year old, handsome Tyrvää man that is ready to embrace his older years



BoD



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