

一杯喜樂

JOY IN A CUP

WE ARE TEA; YOU WILL BE ASSIMILATED

-Sean Newman

Sean's witty story of falling in love with tea is a joy equivalent to what he found in his cup. Sean and Karen are some of our favorite tea people in the world, and good examples of what this Global Tea Hut community is creating, as they were introduced to us all through another community in Estonia. As more tea lovers meet and find friendship or even family through this community, we find ourselves more and more fulfilled by this project.



I have read many wonderful tales in these pages, particularly beautiful stories of the leaf being around people for many years before revealing itself and fully entering their lives. I thought I would let you hear an alternative tale of someone being brought to it grumpy, kicking and screaming before finally succumbing to its charms. A likely story perhaps, but it may be one that resonates with others who are new to a life of tea.

Five years ago, my girlfriend Karen and I took a break to the charming city of Tallinn in Estonia (well worth a visit to anyone who has not been, as the people are very friendly, the food is great and it has the most complete walled medieval city in Europe). We loved

the old town and had a great time visiting the amber jewelry shops, the lovely restaurants, the chocolate shop at the Masters Courtyard as well as appreciating the many arts and crafts vendors. All this against the wonderful backdrop of the beauty and energy of the place itself. However, there was one thorn from day one that wouldn't go away. Karen found a flyer for a shop called "Chado" that sold.... you guessed it, *tea!* Not only had she found it, but bugged me multiple times per day to go while I reeled out excuses (actually, well-reasoned arguments I'll have you know!) not to. You see, my tea drinking history had been less than stellar. Here in the UK the general brew is either "Tetley", "PG Tips", "Typhoo" or

"Scottish Blend" which do not bring to mind any class or quality. While indeed a brew they do create, something life-changing they most certainly are not. Up until that time, I had been a coffee drinker, eventually stopping a few years before this tale as I felt tired and out of sorts after drinking it. I did not start drinking tea then, as in my opinion it was generally pretty poor swill and I thought of it as limp, bitter and adding absolutely nothing to my life at all. Oh was I about to have my perception changed, and in no small way!

Two days before we were due to depart, we happened upon a street called Uus and much to my displeasure Karen said, "This is the street the tea shop is on. I'm going



to get some tea for a friend. You can stay here if you want.” By this time, I had used up my book of excuses, short of feigning an illness, so I trooped off after her. A couple of minutes’ walk found us at the door. We entered where we met the lovely Triin (Triin Juurik whom some of you may know from these pages). For those of you who have met Triin, you will know how warm and welcoming she is. She made us feel at ease and at home. I was on my best behavior and pretended some interest while Karen bought some tea for her friend. Triin asked us what teas we liked and then to my surprise asked us both to pick a tea and she would make it for us. Knowing completely zero about tea I may as well have closed

my eyes and pointed. After looking at and smelling a few, I settled on a Japanese green *sencha* called “Fukamushi”. I guess I chose it because I knew I didn’t like “black” teas (which I now know is what we call red tea) and I thought a green would be the safer option. My sister drinks green tea exclusively: a tea-bag in a cup, boiling water poured over and steeped for several minutes. Yup, bitter as hell, and I thought that’s what I was in for. Anyhoos, within a few minutes this cup of green tea arrived and was served to me with a smile. While not being too interested, I still appreciated the lovely thing she had done and the way she served it. I took a sip. First shock... *This is lovely!!* So sweet and delicate, gently landing in my

mouth and encircling it with a wonderful, sweet, rich flavor. I cannot tell you enough about the pleasure I experienced in that cup, nor do I have the words to fully describe it here. However, to say I was won over instantly by its flavor would be an accurate statement. So there I was drinking the loveliest cup of tea I can ever remember drinking and not thinking much about anything other than the joy of that sweet pleasure. I was enjoying the atmosphere, smells, the visual interest of such a lovely tea shop and listening to Triin and Karen talking to each other. I was tossing in a few words now and then, having a few sips of this delectable brew when the next shock came upon me. I must have drunk about half the cup

and something amazing happened. I have described it to others as if a temple bell had gone off inside me, like a gong sounding, awakening a clarity that I had not experienced before. If you can imagine feeling completely normal just as you are right now; and then, quickly, from your head down throughout your body, a sharpening of your perception that you had never experienced before. Sight, sound and awareness were all heightened above what I normally perceive into what I can only describe as 'clarity'. An excitement grew in me and I knew I had to find out more about what had just happened, as there was no way I could ignore it. I was compelled to take away some of that tea for myself and explore more. I had meditated a fair bit over the years but this felt like a door had been opened into something else—a sharper reality that I wanted to listen to and take in. We stayed for a while longer emptying our cups, bought some teas and thanked Triin for her hospitality. I headed out shell-shocked into the street.

We were heading home the next day and Karen asked if there was anything I wanted to do before we left. There was only one thing to do: *Go back to Chado*. Triin had told us that the owner Steve (Steve Kokker whom you will all know from these pages) would be there. Sure enough he was, and greeted us warmly when we arrived. He knew who we were, as Triin had told him about our visit and he gave generously of his time. We bought a few more things: a glass tea pot, some more tea and Steve gave me a gift of a little puerh to try at home. I can remember thinking, "Black tea? I'll never drink that!" Oh how wrong I was.

To bring this story up to date: that was five years ago. Since then we have returned to Tallinn every year to enjoy the city, but more to touch base with everyone at Chado and learn more about the spirit of Tea. Five years is such a short time and I'm still a beginner in the art of



serving and drinking tea and will be for many years to come. However, there has been some progress and growth in that direction. I put that down to several things: what I have learned in these pages, my own effort in trying to feel the tea spirit, but mostly my thanks to Steve for steeping me in his own tea energy. His passing on of tea spirit takes many forms: talking about tea, sharing lovely teas, caring and helping others on their tea journeys, living a tea life himself, showing his passion and creating a movement of tea in Tallinn. When asking Steve about it, he very humbly says that Wu De

is the engine behind all that I see of the tea spirit here (Tallinn). But I think there is a fair bit of Steve in there as well!* There may be many tea 'engines' out there, but I feel particularly grateful to Global Tea Hut and the Chado gang in Estonia who

**A recent survey conducted in Estonia showed that actually 99 out of 100 Estonian tea people felt Steve had much more to do with the spread of tea culture there than Wu De ever would. (And the other 1 was that bum in the park Steve wrote about serving tea to. The one who was drinking cologne.)*



are all helping to change me and this little world of ours, sip by sip...

These ripples of tea spirit are spreading out and have now reached the shores of my young nephew Fraser who is a tea lover aged eleven! He particularly likes Cliff Tea and strong smoky puerh.... go figure? Unusual for one so young, I believe. It is a true blessing to pass on this spirit, especially knowing its journey from Taiwan via Estonia, to become inhabited in the body of a wee boy in the UK. A blessing indeed.

By the way, I never managed to replicate either the taste nor the experience of the Fukamushi when

I brewed it at home. As I learned later, there is a fair bit of the brewer that goes into each cup. For those who have met Triin, you will know that she carries a sweetness and delicacy within her that is unusual to find. I am striving to find these qualities in myself and maybe, with some effort, I may get there—with the help of a bowl or two of tea of course.

Left: These ripples of tea spirit are spreading out and have now reached the shores of my young nephew Fraser who is a tea lover aged eleven!

Right: Steve and Wu De at Hope Market Serving tea.

Dedicated to Steve Kokker for his 50th birthday who asked me to write this piece several years ago!