

It was the summer of 1998 when I finally got my chance to get to Finland: a three-month contract with the Reuters News Agency in Helsinki, which focused much of its resources on covering the story of a Finnish company about to become the world leader in mobile phones. Three months turned into another three months, after which I got a permanent contract. I not only had my foot in the door, I was finally on the inside.

There were many things to keep me occupied. Finland was growing by leaps and bounds, with Nokia leading the way. The company had its hand in many parts of the Finnish economy then, not just all things electronics. Nokia wasn't just the flavour of the day, it also had a great backstory: from paper to rubber boots, cables to televisions, the company had done it all during its long history, finally focusing on mobile telephony with impeccable timing. From Barcelona to Beijing, people wanted to hear this story.

But Nokia was doing more than just selling phones and telecommunications gear; they were selling the Finland brand as well. It was often via Nokia that the world would get a window onto those "quirky Finns" who held wife-carrying contests in the summer, and not only made mobile phones, but held a competition to see who could throw them the farthest. Oh, and let's not forget "air guitar" contests, either. For a journalist trying to sell the Finland story, these were golden years, and the country punched well above its weight in making it online or into newsprint.

Years of writing about Nokia brought me into almost daily contact with people from the company, so the next step was in many ways logical: work for Nokia. The transition was not too difficult, really; in many ways I was still doing the same job – telling the story of Nokia and, more broadly, Finland – just from the other side of the interview table.

*Brett Young is Head of External Communications at Nokia.*

As I write this, I continue to work for Nokia, which is now 151 years young and has reinvented itself once again, this time purchasing Alcatel-Lucent to become a giant in the mobile and fixed networking business. It also has its toe in fast-growing markets like virtual reality and digital health.

Personally, I put the cart in front of the horse by first coming to Finland, then meeting the Finn of my life. I met my future wife in 1999, we got married in 2002, and now have two lovely daughters. I realized another dream by applying for citizenship and obtaining it in 2012. I can now wave two flags with pride, although dual citizenship does present its problems when the puck drops and the blue and white face the red and white. Luckily, two passports also means twice the chance to win.

Given my desire to get to Finland, and the roots I have now put down here, it's clear that there's no going back to Canada. The quality of life, including Finland's renowned schooling system, have made this decision easier, and thanks to technology staying in touch with family in Canada is immeasurably easier than when I left the country in the 1990s. The question is what will our kids decide: stay in Finland, or use their Canadian citizenship to explore the land of their father?

So, decades after I first asked the question who are these Finns with their long last names and difficult language, I think I have come to know the answer: they are a fiercely proud nation of 5.4 million people who often eschew chest-beating and self-promotion and simply get to work, whether it's cleaning up at the cottage after winter, picking berries in the summer, or, when on the ice, digging the puck out of the corner to set up a scoring chance. I'm proud to say that I am now one of them.