



## **Interview with a Piece of Salted Licorice**

From the day that I was produced, I thought my purpose in life was simple: to be eaten, and enjoyed. As a piece of ordinary salted licorice, I would never imagine that my luck would take me not only across Denmark, but far north to the land of Estonia and Sweden...

The student who bought me must have not liked me very much, because there I lay, in her pocket, untouched and forgotten. SO forgotten in fact, that I was able to remain in her pocket for the entire trip. Not having much to do, I had learned a great deal about what this trip was about. Learning about human children with special needs was all fine, but the students needed to see more of what could be done across Europe. I took my first ride in an airplane, 2 hours later, we landed in Tallinn, Estonia.



How different could these children in Estonia possibly be? I had spent a great deal of time

around Danish children who loved salted licorice, so I thought I knew everything there was to it. However, after visiting a place called “Ristikü School”, I knew there things couldn’t be that simple.

I managed to take a peek out of my pocket home, and watch a lady speak about how some parents in Estonia were ashamed of their children with special needs, and that sometimes, one parent wouldn’t tell the other that the child was a little different. However, this school was doing all it could for the children. The lady took the students on a tour of the school, so naturally I was able to see all the different activities provided for the children. For one thing, the classes were so small! For the typically developing children, the classes in Denmark were much larger than this. I used to sit in a bowl of assorted licorice on the teacher’s desk, so I had a broad view of the students. This view in Estonia was similar, but also different.

Like many classes, these children didn’t look too excited about having to learn math, but the strange thing was how many boys there were compared to girls. I’m a piece of salted licorice, so there’s only one kind of me, so I pay a lot of attention to the differences between boys and girls. Even though there was a boy majority, the class seemed to get along great, and the girls seemed comfortable. Not only did they have to learn math, but they also had history, English, wood shop and art.

At one point during the tour, I felt a halt. I realized that the student whose pocket I was in had stopped because there was a small crowd around a young girl. This girl had special needs, but seemed like the happiest girl in the world. She was enjoying having her picture taken by the other students, and when they were done, she ran off and joined her friends, waving at the students. Granted, I've only ever seen the inside of a supermarket and a pocket, but this school seemed like a great place for learning. How could you NOT be inspired to learn when they've built a beautiful school and filled it with passionate people?

We spent another couple enjoyable days in Tallinn, some in the rain (didn't make much of a difference to me, because I was in a pocket), and then we headed off to Sweden.

After a long and rocky boat ride, we arrived in Stockholm.



After much confusion on the trains and almost getting crushed in my pocket, we arrived at yet another school in the outskirts

of Stockholm. The students sat around patiently, listening to a talk about the school, when suddenly, I started to hear a familiar song. I knew that in the supermarket I was sold in, they used to play Michael Jackson all the time, but in a school? I peaked out of my pocket to see little children dancing to "Beat It." My little salted licorice heart was delighted. The whole rest of the visit I was in good spirits. And for good reason too, because this school was wonderful. I saw many pictures of families on the walls and grew a little homesick for the rest of my salted licorice family in a bag back in Denmark.

I started to wonder however, about the special needs children in this school. Wasn't that the whole reason I was inadvertently brought on this trip? For the students to learn about special needs? My question was answered almost instantly by the lady telling us about the school. The man who started "Stella Nova" had the philosophy "what special needs?" This was the most different perspective I had seen yet. But could it truly work? One look at the school and you'd become a believer. As the students walked through all the different rooms, I was able to see all the games the children were playing. Some were playing with dinosaurs, some were playing in a

circle with an adult, some were sitting down eating soup, and some were helping set the table for lunchtime. Whatever the activity, all the kids seemed to be capable.

I know that humans are much more capable than salted licorice, but I never knew CHILDREN could be this capable. I suppose if you set up the right environment and support system, you can pretty much encourage the kids to succeed at anything! As for me, my environment was merely a pocket of a raincoat, but by being able to sit back and listen and see, I was able to learn a whole lot more than by just sitting in a bowl on a teacher's desk.



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