



Mielenreitti

Mind's Path

– Stories of hope and encounters in nature

Along the nature trail built around Lake Suolijärvi in Hervanta, Tampere, there are nine stories of hope written by different individuals. The authors have personal experiences of mental health challenges and difficult life situations, as well as of strengthening their well-being with the support of nature.

The purpose of these stories is to bring forward topics that may feel difficult and to reduce prejudices related to mental health challenges. For all those walking the trail, the stories offer an opportunity to pause and reflect on their own life situation, while also sensing the connection between humans and nature.

The illustrations on the boards have been created by nine individuals interested in visual expression. They are different people from the writers of the stories. The illustrations were inspired by the stories.

Breaking Free from Shame

I have been trapped for years in a life situation that has felt completely hopeless. I have allowed into my life a person who is violent towards me. I am alone with my secret, because shame prevents me from speaking about it.

As long as I carried my burden alone, it was too heavy to bear. **But when I confided in one person, the shame eased a little. The second time, it eased a bit more.** Those were glimmers of hope. Shame took on its true, diminished proportions when I revealed it to others. Could it be that I, too, have the right to escape?

And one day, I left. I ran like a cow to spring pasture, toward freedom: colors and scents that I had already forgotten in my prison. Now that I am free, nothing limits my growth anymore—I spread my roots and branches wherever I choose.

Hannele, 38 years old

Illustration: Noora



Living Beside a Loved One Who Has Fallen III

With the change in my well-being, I dare to step out from the shadow of my reflection, without caring about the occasional soft dimness of clouds. The rising sun melts the icy frost, carrying away pieces of my dark memories.

I find myself repeating my double life alongside a loved one who has turned out to be ill, even as I long to recover. Persistently, I fulfill my duties, subdued into the role of the one who bears responsibility. I grow weary with you. When can I truly be myself and let my creativity and imagination be seen? **Let me be alone, so I do not feel lonely!** I need air beneath my wings to have the strength to be with you.

You must understand that my well-being is a change within me—and you, too, must face it. Could you share in my joy as I find strength?

There, in the remote forest village, nature was always present, giving space for solitude, a chance to grow into myself. Surrounded by nature, I felt lighter—I was whole. I lived with all my senses open, breathing in nature, calming down. As I listened to the faint murmur of a spring brook, I knew to expect a thunderstorm before a cleansing wind would blow in from the distance.

I continue my journey toward a day glowing with warmth, the shadow of my reflection fading farther away with every step.

Ulla-Maya, 67 years old

Illustration: Jonna



Exhaustion of Life

The paths of my life have wound through unsafe, even traumatic terrain since childhood. By nature, I have always been very kind and sensitive. All of this has colored my decades. I learned to navigate my tangled paths as best I could—struggling and floundering, yet persistently determined. At some point, I completely lost myself and became worn down by life's exhaustion.

My illness was fueled by the survival strategies and patterns I had developed. I built a box for my suppressed emotions, stuffing into it anger, grief, distress, disappointment, feelings of exclusion, loneliness—and eventually even joy and hope. I tried to make my way by being as unobtrusive as possible: scentless, tasteless, invisible. At the same time, I did anything to avoid even the smallest conflict around me. Anxiety ran close behind me, my box overflowed with emotions, and I kept trying to hold it together and keep it hidden. In the end, anxiety caught up with me, and my box of emotions burst open, shattering my world.



When the smoke cleared, I crawled back onto my feet and slowly began to make new kinds of choices in my life—setting gentle boundaries and sketching outlines for myself. I began to seek out nature: at first just to find peace, later to feel empowered. **Dips in cold natural waters and lying on a mossy mound have grounded me and helped me pause when stress and overactivation take over my body and mind.** Climbing to the top of a ridge, hill, or fell has given me, through physical challenge, many feelings of overcoming myself—and the views have always rewarded me with a sense of freedom. The scents and sounds of different forests, and especially bodies of water, have a wonderfully calming effect on me. I have often found myself drawn to many nature experiences for reasons I did not consciously understand—and only later realized why.

All in all, these new, healing experiences have strengthened my boundaries and my inner flame for life, helping me learn to listen to myself and find my path toward more open landscapes.

November Girl -80

Illustration: Jessica



Rejection – Loneliness

I was already bullied in primary school, but things began to spiral much worse very quickly after my father passed away from cancer when I was 15. I felt that, in dying, my father had abandoned me—and that the rest of my family had done so through their own actions as well. That marked the beginning of years of torment, which reached a breaking point a few years ago when, at work, I completely hit a wall with the belief I had learned: that as long as you work hard, you are a good person. I wished that everything would just end, so I wouldn't have to keep going—and so I wouldn't be alone anymore.

In childhood, what helped me cope was our family dog, who brought me comfort and a sense of safety. I especially loved going for walks with our dog on clear winter evenings. **Whenever I gazed at the stars, I felt an inner peace and the sense that I was not alone.**

Nowadays, I could say that a truly good friend I found through scouting has saved my life—at least to the extent that things are not much worse. I've spent a lot of time with him and his family in nature, sometimes swimming, sometimes doing forest work. These days, I feel that nature is like a second home to me. In nature, I can always calm down and relax, knowing that things are steadily getting better.

Jonttu, 28 years old

Illustration: Anna



The Development of My Relationship with Nature

Growing up in the countryside, I was expected to stay and inhabit the family farm, with its traditions and responsibilities. This made it difficult for me to form a relationship with nature. The only natural element I experienced as safe, up until the age of 35, was the shoreline of our summer cottage, with its rocks and the sense of territory it created.

A longing for freedom and for life in the city entered my life already at the age of 20, when I worked in Helsinki for three months as a summer trainee. I had to return to Helsinki again and again, many times each year, even though I lived and worked on a farm. **My heart was in the city, my outer shell in the countryside.**

While living under stress and pressure in the countryside, and being overly accommodating, mental illness gained the upper hand and I drifted into psychosis. Through therapy and my circle of friends, I found myself and let go of that excessive need to please. The process continues, and my own voice is being heard more and more. As someone in recovery, I feel I am on the winning side.

As I have found balance in my relationship with nature, my mind has also partly calmed. Now that I live in the city of Tampere, I even find myself healthily longing for the cottage and the peace of the countryside. I no longer really need Helsinki—except when I visit the friends I have there.

Tampere, with its urban nature and outdoor routes, allows my mind to rest—just like this **“Mielenreitti”** (Mind Trail).

Former farmer, 53 years old

Illustration: Aku



What Is It Like to Be Different?

Since the age of 18, I have been living on social benefits, and my life has been different from many others. While many people have worked a lot, started families, paid off mortgages—done the things that usually happen in life—I have lived a different kind of life than most.

Bullied at school, somehow different, and further made different. In a way, even well-intentioned, I was structurally set apart through various systems: special education, a rehabilitation home, and hospital care.

I have longed for a sense of belonging, and thankfully, I have now found it. Through various organizations, I have gained inclusion, so I didn't end up isolating myself at home. I have been involved in many things, found meaning and relationships. I have worked as a cleaner, also professionally, acted as an expert by experience, been involved in research-based theatre, participated in training on the shore of the Pacific Ocean, and done volunteer work by Lake Suolijärvi. I know how to assemble a Trangia stove. All kinds of adventures in an otherwise ordinary, grey everyday life.

My relationship with nature—why, how, when?

It's hard to answer precisely, because growing up in the suburbs, nature has always simply been there, self-evidently surrounding me—I have lived and grown as part of it. Animals have played an important role in my life, even during times when things have not been going well.

I am here and now; **the pine trees, hopefully, do not worry.** Just existing. Thank you for existing.

Kristian, 44 years old

Illustration: Lili



Walk with Me

The thoughts produced by my depressed mind were dark and full of despair. I wandered aimlessly through the thicket, without direction, following those who walked ahead of me. I roamed for a long time, searching for my own path on the orienteering map of my life. I had lost my sense of direction, and perhaps my map had been upside down all along without me noticing. The checkpoints at the beginning were left unfound, as my compass spun wildly due to the magnetic pull of others and the crisscrossing paths.

On my map, I recognized small hills and bare rocks that I tried to climb with the last of my strength. I struggled through hollows, bogs, and marshes, stepping carelessly with my worn rubber boots so that my feet became soaked in murky water. At times, I sank up to my armpits into quagmires, not knowing how I would get back onto solid ground. Often, I tried to thrash, kick, and struggle free from the past, to climb up and roll onto dry heath to rest.

Without the help of fellow travelers, I would not survive this lifelong wilderness journey. A pause on the edge of the marsh makes it easier to take a new direction, as my torn terrain map is pieced together the right way up and my compass needle once again points north. Now the decaying duckboards, the bustling anthill, and the shimmering stream guide my thoughts forward. At last, I walk toward the next checkpoint, hidden out of sight.

What an adventure life is!

Auli, 58 years old

Illustration: Juulia



Sick with Strength

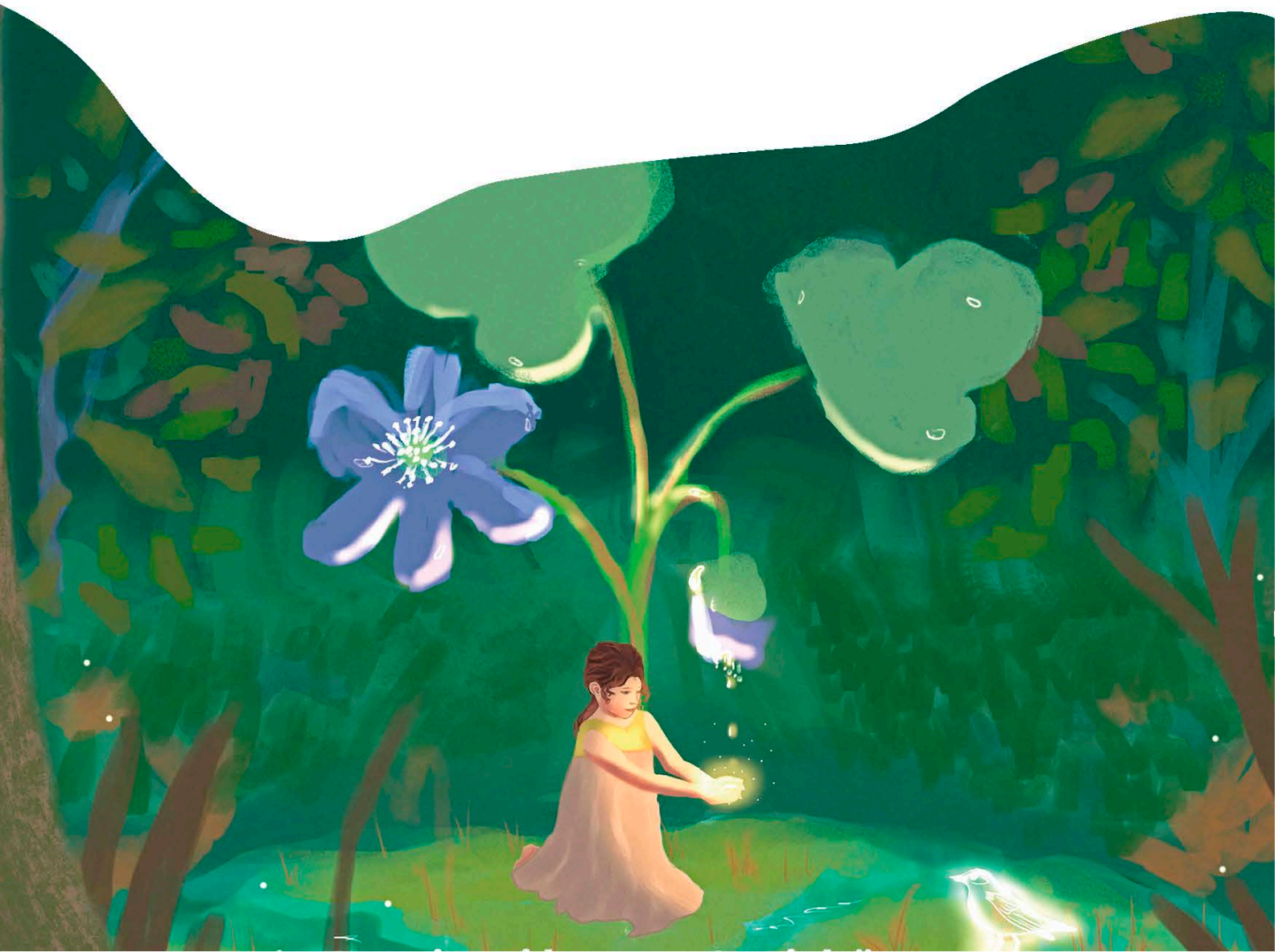
As a child in an alcoholic family, I had to manage on my own and carry responsibilities that do not belong to a child. From all this followed excessive kindness, over-empathy, the pursuit of perfection, constant striving, listening to other people's worries and sorrows—and loneliness.

I abandoned myself and overlooked my own needs. This led to becoming “sick with strength,” to depression, and to complete exhaustion. I did not allow myself to grow tired, but instead believed that my worth depended on how much I was able to accomplish.

Daily walks in nature helped me get through one day at a time. **The green of the forest, the blue of the lake, the spring hepatica flowers, the song of the nightingale in the shoreline park, and the rustling of reeds in the summer wind helped me to calm down.**

Riitta, 72 years old

Illustration: Wilma



Do I Belong Here?

I was born here as a girl, like a summer breeze—hair flowing, full of sensitivity, enthusiasm, and courage. In childhood, I felt loved. At times, however, words like “a dreamer” drifted as my shadow, in an environment where hard work was valued above all. The first dark clouds entered my life when my friend moved away. I was left alone, and bullying at school began. I was no longer the hopeful and brave little girl. In her place came an overly accommodating performer—neglecting her own boundaries and demanding too much of herself as a teenager. I found comfort in animals, and nature gave me a way to release my distress through physical work. I felt alone with the lump that had formed in my heart, yet to animals I was enough just as I was, without demands.

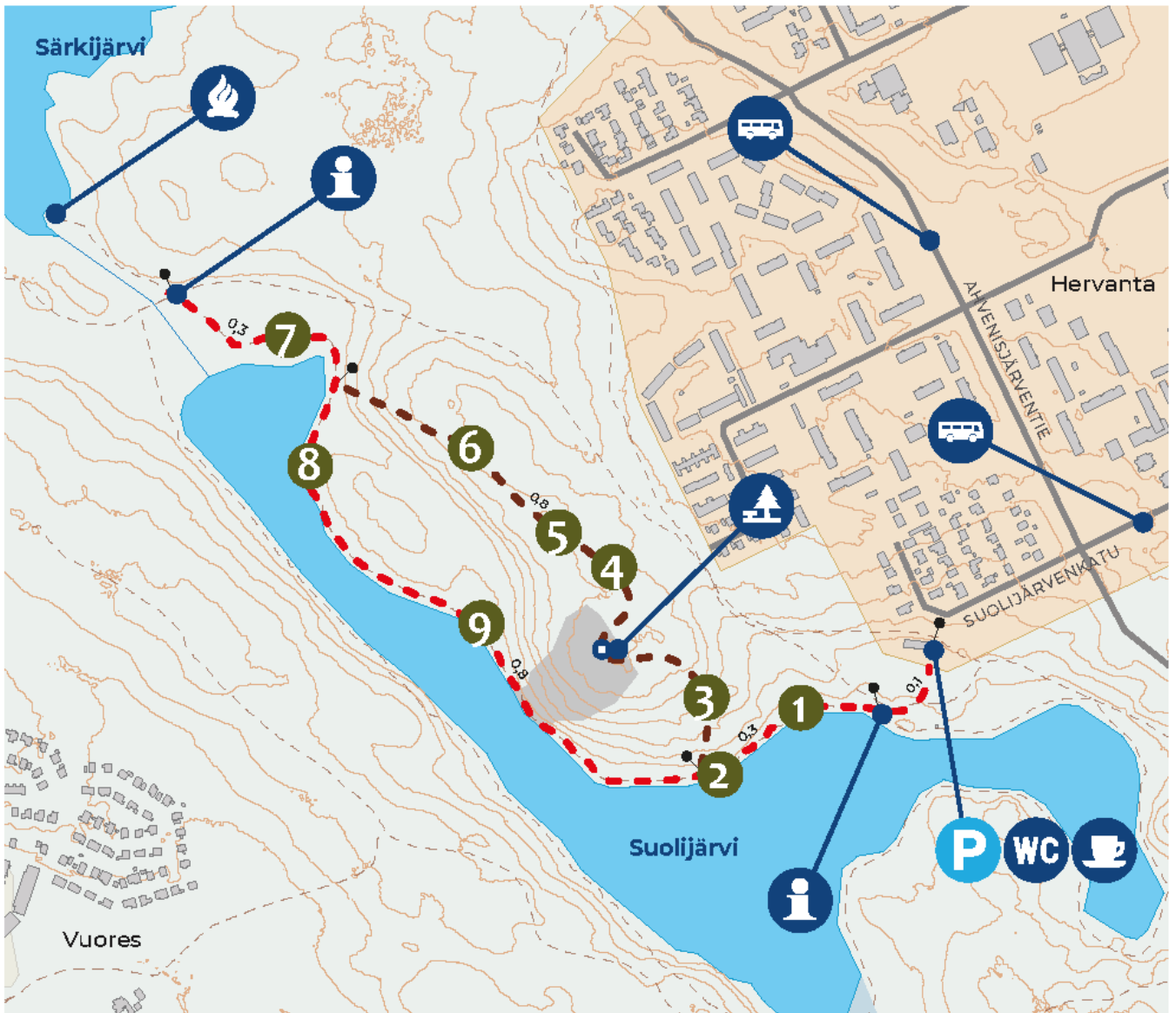
I formed healing relationships in my life, but the overly accommodating performer continued to cast its shadow in my working life, in relationships, and in my romantic partnership. Without realizing it, I pleased others and imagined that this way they would accept and love me—and that I wouldn't be abandoned. I kept running in the hamster wheel of work life and motherhood, occasionally retreating to inpatient care to rest. Bipolar disorder became my companion, and only after a separation **did I truly stop to reflect: what does the little girl in my heart need and want?**

At the moment, I am searching for a life that feels like my own—one where there is space for my needs. During the most difficult times of my life, nature has been important. As an adult, water in particular has been my refuge. From the shore rocks, I watch the movement of the water: no matter how stormy or calm the surface is, the water never stops moving. It persistently continues forward, bringing me comfort and hope in this moment.

Merituulia, 41 years old

Illustration: Lili





Mielenreitti

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More info in English: outdoorstamper.fi/en/accessible-destinations

