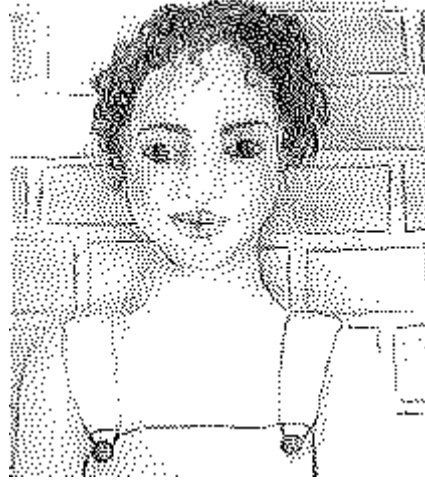


# Little Chimney Sweeper

East-Pori Middle School / Itä-Porin yläaste,  
Pori, Finland



## Through sister's eyes

My three-year birthday is the first day in my childhood that I remember. That's when my mother let us know that she was pregnant - whatever that meant?

After some explaining I understood that there was growing in her womb a little baby, but I forgot about it quite soon, because I didn't consider it important.

Time went by and a lot of baby equipment was brought home. One spring day when mother was putting babyclothes on the top shelf and I was watching cartoons in the bedroom, she tumbled from the stool and the things from the top shelf fell over her. I don't remember very much what happened, but I remember that mom was taken to hospital by the ambulance. Later on I understood that the reason for taking her to the hospital was that in the accident mom had a miscarriage.

Mom and dad still tried to have another child, but in vain. In the end the doctor said that mother couldn't have any more children and advised my parents to consider adoption. They got lots of different forms to fill in and child welfare officials came by to interview them and me as well. At the same time they also searched all over our home and examined our family life. I do not remember very much of the whole process myself, but doctors and even the psychologists examined us in order to find out if they could consider giving us a child. Around Christmas my parents were

contacted and they were informed that they were qualified to be in the queue with those who want to adopt a child.

On my fourth birthday we flew over to get the promised child in the Red Cross hospital in Guatemala. A middle-aged lady came to meet us and took us to a cot, in which a little, about half a year old babyboy with dark skin was sleeping. I asked my mother: - Why does that child look all sooty? Laughing shortly my mom and dad answered: - Oh, he is not sooty. His skin is by birth darker than ours.

All the way home, Joakim, that is how we named him later, slept and I looked at him. I didn't realize then yet, what a big part he would play in my life. Joakim grew and developed normally and soon we played a lot together. Also our relatives and friends admired him and he was considered a member of the family and that is what he was. He grew into a real showman, who always wanted to show his different skills and tricks. Years went by and Joakim went to preschool and then to primary school. At school he was well received and he had lots of friends there, young and also older. He also started playing ice-hockey as a hobby. He became a skillful defenseman.

Joakim liked going to school and he loved his hobby. It was an embarrassing experience to him that we had to move to Kokemaki because of father's work. - He kept asking: - I wonder how they'll like me there in the new school? What's going to happen to my ice-hockey hobby?

### **Joakim tells**

I was on my way to primary school in Kokemaki for the first time. I was excited but at the same time I was full of enthusiasm. At the schoolgate tens new faces were curiously looking at me. Then the schoolbell rang. I ran happily in but my smile soon froze on my face, when suddenly among the group of boys a shout was heard: - Chimneysweeper! I got embarrassed and turned over to see the shouter. He was a tall, fairhaired boy in neat clothes. I got embarrassed a little by his behaviour, because nobody had said so badly about the colour of my skin before. When there was no more shouting, I however, walked briskly to the classroom and paid no more attention to the boy.

The first day went by with no more remarks but the next day it really started: the nasty talks echoed around me. The same gang of boys that had already the very first day scorned me, made also other pupils at school scorn and bully me. There were around ten boys in the group and the same tall, fairhaired boy was the leader.

There was no ice-hockey team of my age in Kokemaki. That was also one of the reasons for me to become gloomy. After a week at school mom was asking the reason for my gloominess: - Joakim, is there something wrong? Hopefully they are not bullying you at school?

I kept staring at my socks and mumbled that I was all right. I said that I was only a little tired and wanted to go to bed. I ran quickly up the stairs to my room.

### **Sister tells**

Then I caught mother in the sleeve and said: - Mom, I think that they are really bullying Joakim in the new school. That's when my mother decided to get in touch with the school. She asked the teacher to follow how Joakim was doing at school and how he was getting along among his classmates. The teacher had also noticed the bullying that was going on and took the boys aside and talked to them. It seemed to make the situation worse. The gang of boys started calling him a talebearer. Month by month Joakim became more and more depressed. We didn't notice it clearly enough. We thought that bullying was over and forgotten.

Christmas holidays came and went by. The last evening of the holidays Joakim seemed nervous. I said to him: - You are doing just fine at school, aren't you? The bullying is over, isn't it? Joakim was quiet and wished me good night.

One day Joakim went towards to slide. We didn't know then that he had been making a snowman by himself, when Make and his gang came... Mother and I were waiting and wondering why he didn't come home and finally we went looking for him. We found him crying under the slide. Blood had run out from his nose. We took him home and he went straight to bed to sleep beside daddy. In the morning he wasn't willing to comment on what had happened. He only said that he had fallen over.

One evening I went with mother to the cinema. Father also had time free so the two men were going to have a nice evening together at home.

Then Joakim had been complaining to his father: - Why do everybody scorn and bylly me at school? Why don't they like me?

Father told us that he became quiet first, but then he had said:

- Son, you must pull yourself together. You mustn't pay any attention to what they say. You are good just the way you are!

### **Joakim memorizes**

Father's words were like echoes in my mind. I decided that I wouldn't let anyone bully me any more. When one of the bullies again the next day started shouting at me, I ran towards him and hit him in the face. The teacher phoned then my mother and asked her to come and take me home from school. I wasn't bullied any more, I myself was now guilty of bullying...

That day changed everything. Little by little I started to skip school. I felt that everyone had turned against me, even teachers. Finally I was in the situation, that there was no other alternative but an educational institution. Would school be more interesting over there? I kept wondering. When I got there, I thought: - It is better this way.

First I even felt happy there and I got a few friends, but when a year had gone by, I really got tired of it. The fact that the discipline at the institution was very strict, didn't make it any easier. Also a couple of boys started bullying him. I even thought of escaping.

The right moment came, when a new supervisor, who didn't know all the rules, came to the institution. He allowed me to go to the store by myself, presuming that I promised to come back. But I didn't return. I headed to the nearest town and decided to start a new life - by myself.

In town I met Pertti. He had already lived long on the streets so he could point me good places to beg. I also had in mind a wish that I one day could return to my former home country, Guatemala to see my childhood home. But I suppose it would not be possible. I sometimes also had desperate thoughts in my mind that I would't have the strenght to live any more. I begged for food and money on the streets of the town and tried to support myself that way.

I was in a bad shape. I lost weight and felt quite sick. In my mind I had a wish that my mother would come and take me home from the strange town. Then one day when I was freezing and hungry I decided to head towards home.

In the evening, behind the home door, I thought of the good times when I still lived at home with mom, dad and my sister. I was terribly cold. Tears froze on my cheeks. In the end I decided to ring the doorbell and return to my former good life.

### **Sister's address**

I went to answer the doorbell and saw a dark shadow drawing already away. I shouted: - Who are you? The shadow stopped and there was the voice: - Don't you know me? Right at the moment I recognized the voice, my brother's voice. I invited him to come in from the freezing cold night.

Joakim stepped in cold and in ragged clothes. Mother heard the voices and came to the hall to see if she had heard right. Yes, it was true! Joakim had come home! Mother couldn't say a word when she saw Joakim cold and in ragged clothes. She hurried to the kitchen to make some hot chocolate for Joakim and brought him a warm blanket.

### **Joakim is at home**

I wasn't able to say a word. I just stood there looking at the dear people around me, who I had sometimes left behind me.

My mother asked me finally: - Where have you been all this time? What has happened to you? I was quiet for a moment and then I answered:

- I do not wish to talk about it right now.

### **Sister finishes her story**

Suddenly my brother's eyes were filled with tears. I took Joakim to his own room to sleep. Again all the childhood memories came to my mind. My best friend, my brother, my childhood friend ...

Coughing and sneezing was heard from Joakim's room. Then he, however, fell asleep. I didn't want to wake him. He seemed so delicate and sick.

In the morning my father took him to the hospital for a check up because of the bad cough. The doctors examined him carefully and told us that Joakim had a lung cancer and they couldn't help him any more. He only had a few weeks left.

Joakim had to stay in hospital. I stayed by him. In the morning Joakim was awake... I had fallen asleep beside him on the bench. He woke me up: - Sister dear, wake up! I was startled out of my sleep almost immediately.

Joakim wanted me to ask mom and dad to come almost immediately to the hospital, because he had something important to say to all of us.

After a while mom and dad were already there. Joakim said to us:

- I have only one wish to you. I would like to write to my real parents at least once and let them know, how much I still care for them and tell them what my life has been like and in what situation I am here now.

My mom said: - Of course, you dear child.

I soon got pencil and paper to Joakim and he started to write a letter to Guatemala, to his parents. For the first time in his life.

- Now I am happy, Joakim said then.

- So are we, we said...

Over the few next weeks Joakim got worse and worse. During the last night we all stayed by his bed. Suddenly Joakim was awake and said:

- It was lovely to see you all once again. I love you.

Then he passed away to eternal sleep. Luckily he couldn't see the mail that came from Guatemala. His letter came back. On the envelope were the words: " Receiver unknown".