

## LAURI (working title)

### Original Book Written by Tapani Suonto

Erkki Kanto  
Atophill™ Films  
www.atophill.com  
mobile 1-(805) 462-7081  
erkki.kanto@atophill.com

Genre: Faith-Based Drama

**Logline:** This true story of how a drunken bum from a garbage dumpster in Helsinki with the help from God finally ended up sitting beside presidents of nations is one worth reading. Without numerous documents and the testimonies of many eye-witnesses, it would be difficult for anyone to believe.

**Synopsis:** Lauri felt cold. He took some old newspapers and covered his legs and feet with them. His fingers started to go numb, and it felt like his nose had disappeared. As his toes had suffered frost-bite numerous times, the cold began to really worry him. He drew his hands into the sleeves of his padded jacket and pulled it tightly over his knees. He had to get the blood circulation going in his nose. The lid of a garbage dumpster over his head was held slightly ajar by a folded edition of the local paper. He had to get some oxygen into the tight quarters of the dumpster (a municipal trash container, just 43" long and 28" wide). Now a cold draft was blowing through the slit, and some snowflakes flew in every so often.

When Lauri had crawled into the trash container in the evening, the relative warmth inside it had still provided some protection. Already then, the clear skies had forecast a severe drop in temperature, so Lauri had covered himself carefully with newspapers that evening. The larger Sunday edition of the Helsinki newspaper was the best for warming; it was generally adequate covering for even severe frost.

It was incredible how the cramped quarters of a container intended for waste-paper could be kept warm simply by human body heat. It was often sufficient heating to get a person through the winter. That is, provided that the person was careful to cover himself adequately with newspapers. Many friends had lost a foot or a hand merely through carelessness. Only amputation could save someone suffering from severe frost-bite. Compared to them, Lauri was still coping well. He had survived 20 years as a meths drinker who could still walk on his own two feet.

Lauri's mind wandered over his past. When he left his small home town in the middle of Finland as a young boy to search for his fortune in the world, he had had no idea what path his wanderings would take. He travelled to neighboring country Sweden and took a welding course at a shipyard and got vocational qualifications as a welder. The work didn't satisfy him for long, after alcohol and similar substances came into the picture. After various moves, he eventually found himself in Stockholm. On the banks of the canal right in the center of the city, his miserable life as a homeless alcoholic began. Gradually his contact with the realities of life began to fade, and the time passed for him in the unending foggy state of an alcoholic. He wasn't always sure whether it was night or day, summer or winter.

At the beginning of the 70s, Lauri moved back to Finland and tried once again to return to normal life. He was determined to fight with all his strength against the addiction to drink. For a couple of months, he succeeded, but then his strength failed him. He resigned himself to his fate and drowned his sorrows in continual drunkenness. Helsinki became his home town, living in woods and staircases, under bridges, and in trash containers. A dumpster located in Helsinki was his home for years.

Lauri was shivering more and more. It had to be -4 F outdoors. The dumpster was seldom so cold even in the dead of winter. And now it was just October, or was it? He decided to take a sip of meths to warm himself and pulled out the bottle of his pocket. His fingers were so frozen that he could scarcely get a grip on the cork. At last the bottle opened to Lauri's curses, and he emptied the last drops into his mouth. It warmed his stomach and set his blood circulating. A pity there was no more. He would have to last out the night with a dry mouth.

Lauri was tired. Not just because he had been awake for hours. He was tired of his whole life: wandering endlessly in the streets of the city, lolling under bridges and in the gateways of building. The cold nights in the dumpster and the endless search for meths. When there was no more to be found and his head started to clear from its alcoholic fog, an overwhelming sense of the meaninglessness of life would start to crush him. At those moments he longed for just one thing: death. Thoughts of self-destruction began once again to gain control over his mind with remarkable strength. Sometimes he had stood on a bridge next to the Gulf of Finland, listening to the two forces inside him battling for control. "Jump! Jump!" shouted a voice in his confused mind, and although he fought against it, still wanting to live, it brought him one step nearer death. At those moments, he understood how there were powers outside his control struggling in his foggy mind.

The scenery had changed during the night, and a white layer of the first snow of winter covered Lauri's dumpster in the dim light. Memories of childhood came back to him. Lauri had been a child of winter. When he was young, he had known that if he ever

## Lauri - synopsis

accomplished anything great in his life, it would happen in the wintertime. In the winter, he would dig out his skis, his heart throbbing excitedly. He was a ski jumper. The best in the whole village. Everyone knew that one day Lauri Jakkila might even jump for his Olympic gold medal. His 98 meter (321 foot) jump at Ruka approached a record for that slope. How much further would he fly?

The meths soon began to warm Lauri up and thaw him out a bit. The alcohol numbed his anxious mind and made him feel listless. He fell asleep.

Lauri woke up on Friday evening, got out of his dumpster. The day of the week when the "Friday for Christ" campaign took to the streets of Helsinki. The group starting their song in the square was the Hakaniemi evangelism team. Lauri's friend, Arska sat down beside Lauri. "Here they are again," said Arska, pointing to the believers. Lauri screwed up his eyes once again. "I know many of them over there," Lauri replied.

Lauri's foggy mind reminded him of the bottle still in his hand. He no longer felt up to separating the poison and pouring it out onto the ground. He didn't have the strength to worry about what happened to him. He filled his mouth full of saliva. Then he tipped the meths bottle into his mouth and took a gulp. The spit neutralized the bitter drink so that it went down. As he drank, the meths dripped from the corner of his mouth. His whole body stank of meths. He hadn't had a bath for many months, but the smell of meths masked the stench of everything else.

In the year 1989, Lauri was sinking ever deeper into the oblivion of an alcoholic. Every now and then, he would make an appearance at the Hakaniemi street meetings. Sometimes he was seen sitting on a back bench at Salem Pentecostal Church. But no one was able to help him. Lauri's time was starting to run out. He knew it himself. He thirsted for death. His last spark of hope was dying out, and he was mentally preparing himself for his final farewell to life. Death had become his friend.

Suddenly Lauri saw that out of the rush of the crowd, a young man emerged. He approached Lauri, holding out a slip of paper towards him. The young man asked him shyly: "Will you come tonight to the Friday for Christ-meeting?"

Lauri was tired. The young man stepped towards him and continued speaking. When Lauri raised his eyes once more from staring at the ground, again the man stepped back. Lauri began to feel sorry for him. All of a sudden he made up his mind: "As a favor to this shy young man, I'll go with him."

Lauri left for the church with the young man, shuffling along slowly. Sleet was still falling, and the ground was slushy. When they entered the sanctuary, a lot of people had already arrived. The church was almost full, and people were still coming in. It was a colorful and motley crowd. Lauri knew several of them. He sat with the young man about halfway down the church, right next to a wall, and observed everything quietly from there. He was wearing a dirty blue jacket. He hadn't washed for many months and smelled terrible. The stink spread out through the sanctuary. It was Lauri's plan to just sit for a moment and then to sneak out. But gradually his interest was aroused. The program started with a song. Everyone was invited to join in. They all stood up. A small singing group led the song. "There's power in the blood of Calvary" rang out as the congregation joined together in their singing. When he heard that, something happened inside Lauri. A tiny spark of hope was awakened.

"Jesus, if I am still of any use as I am, then I want to give my life to you this evening," he said quietly. "You see, Jesus, that I don't have any place to live, and nothing else either." Then the feeling came to him that tonight was his night. He was still of worth to God.

At that moment Lauri heard a shout behind him: "Hey, Lauri! Come here! I've got some Napoleon Cognac!" It was Hessu, an old drinking buddy. The yell was a surprise to him. Despite the fact that he was still in a stupor, he understood that there was something strange here. How on earth had Hessu managed to get such expensive wine? And why was he offering it just now? Lauri began to understand that a battle for his soul was taking place. He shouted back to Hessu in the echoing church sanctuary, "I'm not leaving now!"

When the song ended, new performers came to the front. The evening meeting was passing by quickly. Lauri was waiting for the altar call so that he could go to the front to be blessed. This was not the first time he had been at a Christian meeting. He knew that at some point people would be invited to come forward.

Finally it was time for the closing speaker. Lauri tried to pay close attention to what the speaker had to say. "This evening you, too, you who are sitting over there on that bench, have a new chance. Your life, too, can change, when you give your life to Christ." Then Lauri left his seat to go forward to the front of the sanctuary. He was among the first to kneel at the altar. A man put his hand on his shoulder and prayed for him. Lauri asked forgiveness for all his sins and prayed for Jesus to come into his life. At the end of the prayer Lauri told the man that he didn't have anywhere to stay and that his whole life was a mess. The man promised him that now everything would be worked out. "God has promised to take care of His own."

He asked Lauri to wait on the front bench for a while. Lauri got up from the altar and sat down on the bench. Then he noticed his hands in surprise. They were red. The man sitting beside him told him that his face was red. At that same moment Lauri suddenly realized that he was no longer drunk. In bewilderment he got up and walked over to the man who had been the evening's speaker, who was now praying at the altar, and said, "Now tell me, where did the booze go?"

## Lauri - synopsis

“Listen, Jesus took the alcohol away when you gave your life to Jesus.”

“What hole did it leave from? Show me the hole. It didn't come out of my mouth at any rate.”

“God doesn't need a hole to take away drunkenness. It leaves without any hole.”

Lauri was speechless. He had never experienced anything like this. Suddenly he was sober. That was the end of the last drunken spell in Lauri's life.

Lauri returned to sit on the bench. A well-dressed, bewhiskered, friendly-looking man in a black leather coat came to talk with Lauri. When he heard that Lauri had no place to live, the man promised Lauri that he could go to a treatment home for the weekend. Lauri began to feel that there was still a chance for his life to work out all right. After a while, the prayer counseling at the altar was over, and Lauri was on his way together with Ensio and a few other men, soon bouncing along in an old van that had once been a police car, headed for the Friday Home. It was after midnight on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, and outside it was still snowing.

Lauri was able to wash himself in the Finnish sauna and dress in clean clothes for the first time in years. His whole life had changed. One evening, in the middle of a night Lauri woke up. It was just like someone had touched him to wake him up. Lauri sat up in the pitch-dark room. Suddenly a strange light appeared in front of him. In the light, he saw a book with the words “Holy Bible” on it in Finnish. After that, the Bible was opened to the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and the verses 8 – 10 were shown to him. While Lauri was looking at the Bible, he heard these words spoken to him: “This passage in God's Word is given to you for the future.”

\*\*\*

Lauri's world had totally changed. He started working for the Salvation Army and he was able to save many of his friends. It was 1990 he was sitting in his home when suddenly a pile of precious stones appeared in front of him by the wall. As Lauri was looking at the heap of sparkling crystals in surprise, wondering how they had got there, the Holy Spirit spoke to Lauri's heart: “You will bring help to the Tartu children's surgical hospital in Estonia.” Then the pile of crystals disappeared. How could he help children in Estonia when he does not really have enough money for himself...

Lauri did not know that in those critical years of transition, health care in Estonia was seriously affected. Many kinds of medicine had run out, which brought great suffering for the patients. Syringe needles had to be continually reused, because there were no disposable needles available. The needles were simply exposed to hot steam and used again. After Lauri had decided to follow his vision and go to Estonia, he received exactly enough money to buy a boat ticket to Tallinn.

In those critical years of transition, health care in Estonia was seriously affected. Almost everywhere there were shortages. Many kinds of medicine had run out, which brought great suffering for the patients. The great lack of anesthetics sometimes meant that operations had to be carried out without any narcotics. A lot of the equipment in general hospital use in the West was not to be found. For these reasons the medical staff was greatly concerned about their patients and sought help for the urgent needs.

When Lauri saw the vision about taking help to the Tartu children's surgical hospital, Soviet-minded supporters of the Inter movement had just broken through the gates of the Toompea Castle and were surrounding the parliament building. Estonian Prime Minister Savisaar had asked the people to protect the Parliament, and the sensitive political situation was highly explosive. As efforts in Estonia to achieve total independence increased in intensity, there was rising anxiety in the country as to how the Soviet Union might react. People prepared themselves for even harder times. Everyone knew that the coming days and years did not promise an easier life. Everyone also knew that the people of Estonia would have to walk their own way alone. No state would come to their aid if the situation exploded into violence. The only one who might help them was God. So there was a lot of praying in the churches on behalf of the fatherland.

After Lauri had decided to follow his vision and go to Estonia, he received exactly enough money to buy a boat ticket to Tallinn. There was not enough money for a ticket to Tartu. When Lauri arrived in Tallinn, he decided to call the hospital. The pediatric surgeon Karin Varik answered the call. Without further explanation, Lauri said that God had told him to help the Tartu children's surgical hospital. To his surprise, she took Lauri seriously immediately, even though she did not know him. Lauri asked her to come to Tallin to meet him. Dr. Varik left for Tallinn, bringing with her pediatric surgeon Ragnar Lõivukene.

The Tartu surgeons had never heard of Lauri before. They had no idea what kind of man Lauri Jakkila might be. They were on their way to Tallinn on the basis of a short telephone conversation. They did not know that Lauri did not possess anything more than his return ticket to Finland. Nor did they know that Lauri did not have the slightest idea how he was going to keep his promise. He simply believed that if God gives a task, He will see it to the end. That trust made Lauri appear trustworthy in the eyes of the doctors.

As soon as he returned home, he would contact various Finnish hospitals. He would tell them he was collecting supplies to assist the Tartu surgical pediatric hospital. Lauri received an immediate positive response to his request, and the supplies began to come from several major hospitals who wanted to help. Soon there was a large collection of bandages, syringes and needles, as well as

## Lauri - synopsis

beds, incubators, blood mixers, and other equipment. Also various pharmaceutical manufacturers joined in so that there was also a large amount of expensive medicine as well as disposable baby diapers to be delivered to Tartu.

And Lauri's work continued after that. He decided to visit the Parliament of Finland, and he was able to arrange religious meetings in the Parliament's coffee room. He met the President of Finland, Mauno Koivisto, wanted to thank Mr. President for his pardon and for pardoning so many prisoners who became believers. He became friends with the Finnish government, The Finnish Broadcasting Company and so many others.

Gradually Lauri's sphere of influence was broadening. In 1993 he became concerned about helping Chinese Christians. His vision about China had to wait for two more years before the way was opened. On his first trip to China, Lauri left in a group of 34 accompanied by hundreds of Bibles, Christian tracts, videos, cassettes, etc. It was still very difficult to get Christian literature and Bibles into China, so that the assistance to local congregations from far-away Finland was of immeasurable value.

Lauri's group gathered before the trip at the Helsinki-Vantaa airport, where the plan was to distribute the literature and other material to be hidden in the bags and clothes of the participants. In the middle of the distribution Lauri heard the Holy Spirit's quiet voice saying: "There's no need for you to hide Bibles. They will go through customs in the cardboard boxes."

In compliance with Lauri's orders, the literature was put back into the cardboard boxes. He took them through all the customs formalities without the intervention of even one Chinese official. The boxes were not even inspected.

Over the years, Lauri made four trips to Peking and Kaifung in order to assist the local congregations. He developed close relations with many Chinese pastors. The most well known was a man held in high esteem by all Chinese Christians, Pastor Huan Allan, who had suffered a great deal in prison for his faith.

It was January 1996. One morning after his wife, Minna, had left for the day care center where she was working, Lauri decided to go out. It was a gray day, and Lauri was bored. He had not scheduled anything special for that day and Lauri asked himself if God might have any new plan for him. A moment later, he was surprised to hear the Holy Spirit's voice: "I am sending you to North Korea. You are to bring help and the Gospel there. You will receive an official state welcome in North Korea."

Lauri's ordinary gray day was suddenly turned upside down. "I'm going to North Korea? And getting an official state reception? I'm just Lauri Jakkila after all, and I don't know anything about North Korea."

Lauri had already seen God do so many unbelievable things in his life that he knew anything and everything was possible for God. If that message he had heard in his mind was from the Holy Spirit, it would be realized in time.

Lauri continued walking. He decided to visit the Parliament. As was his custom, he climbed the stairs to the second floor and went into the parliament café. There he met parliament member Toimi Kankaanniemi, representing the Christian League. Lauri told Toimi his news immediately: "Say, Toimi, I got a calling to North Korea. Will you come with me when the time comes?" "Yes, I'll come," answered Toimi, thinking no more about it.

Nothing happened with respect to North Korea for quite a while. One and a half year went by, and Lauri continued his work as before and gradually forgot all about North Korea.

One day, Lauri was sitting in the restaurant of the Hotel Arthur with some of his friends. In the middle of their conversation Lauri's mobile phone rang. The caller was Mr. Ri, a diplomat from the North Korean Embassy. He asked to meet with Lauri Jakkila. On the phone they arranged to meet for lunch at the Hotel Inter-Continental.

At their lunch meeting, Mr. Ri expressed the hope that Crusade Via Dolorosa would spread the word to Christians all over the world that they were being asked to help the people of North Korea. Lauri accepted the task immediately. The next day the media were informed of the request. They could not believe the news was true. Not until Mr. Ri himself publicized the matter was it sufficient confirmation for them. The news was broadcast on the Finnish television on September 17, 1997. Lauri Jakkila and Mr. Ri were interviewed during the main news broadcast that evening. Immediately after that the news spread throughout the world.

The next day, a shipping company Oy Huolintakeskus Ab announced that it was donating 230 tons of food for delivery to North Korea. Although the goods were a free donation, \$80 000 were needed for the freight costs. The fast food chain Hesburger contributed \$18 000 towards freight costs. The balance of the freight costs were donated by individual people. Lauri would also need a transit permit to transport the freight by train via Russia. So the freight was ready for the journey.

On November 23<sup>rd</sup>, Lauri left with his friends, journalists and Finnish parliament members for North Korea. There to see them off at the Helsinki-Vantaa Airport were Ambassador Ri Ju Gwan from the Helsinki North Korean Embassy as well as reporters and Lauri's friends. The freight had begun the trip nearly a month earlier than their flight. With the interpreter and three parliament members, Lauri flew first to Peking. From there the journey would continue to the capital of North Korea, Pyongyang, in a plane belonging to the North Korean Airlines.

## Lauri - synopsis

“What do you think is waiting for us, seeing as God told me a year and a half ago there would be an official reception?” Lauri asked Toimi Kankaanniemi, who was sitting beside him.

Toimi was not able to answer that question either, but it would soon become clear. North Korea was only a few hours' flight away. After that there would be no need to wonder any longer.

A Korean stewardess approached Lauri. In English she politely asked Lauri and his delegation to follow her. Lauri walked behind her along the aisle of the plane to the open door. There a group of Koreans was coming to meet him with a huge bouquet of flowers. Lauri and his party were told they were heartily welcome as the flowers were offered to them. In bewilderment Lauri accepted the flowers, thanking politely in Finnish. With his flower bouquet he climbed down the steps to the airfield. As he stepped forward he saw the crowds gathered around the plane, the microphones and television cameras. Everyone's gaze was fixed on Lauri. The cameras filmed his every step. He had suddenly become the leading star of a great drama. As soon as Lauri and his party were on terra firma, they were immediately shown to a small van waiting for them beside the airplane.

The bus drove them a few hundred meters to the VIP lounge of the airport terminal. When he stepped out of the bus, Lauri was welcomed by a small middle-aged woman who seemed very friendly. She was Mrs. Kim Jong Suk. She proved to be one of the leading politicians to hold power in North Korea. The Finnish guests were offered something to drink. The table was also decked with coffee and pastries. Several state representatives had arrived, among them one department head. Lauri was told that his own status in North Korea was equal to that of a deputy minister.

Mrs. Kim Jong Suk gave a short welcome speech for Lauri and his delegation, which was interpreted into Finnish. “On behalf of the state of North Korea, I would like to wish Commander Lauri Jakkila and your Finnish delegation welcome to our country. I would also like to thank Commander Lauri Jakkila for all the assistance which we have received in North Korea from Finland. We are happy that we can meet you personally and have you as our guest...”

Soon the guests were escorted to the waiting Mercedes limousines. The head of protocol led Lauri out and directed him to the car which had been reserved for the commander of the delegation. Mrs. Kim Jong Suk and Jussi sat beside him in the same car. The others in the delegation and the rest of the Korean hosts got into the next Mercedes limousines. The destination of the automobile cavalcade was the Koryo Hotel, where all important state visitors normally stayed.

When the entire delegation was seated in the limousines, the police car escorting the procession moved off with lights blinking and sirens howling. The streets were blocked off and traffic halted as the car cavalcade drove along the streets of Pyongyang. When he heard the police car siren, Lauri recalled times Helsinki, its stinking trash bins and the police cars that often drove his then smelly personage away from the square to jail.

Lauri passed through the customs formalities, weary and lost in his thoughts. The plane had finally landed in his home country Finland, and the flight from Peking to the Helsinki-Vantaa Airport was over. The interesting but exhausting visit to the Far East was now behind him. All that remained were the obligatory customs formalities and the drive from the airport to his home. Suddenly flashbulbs lit up around him again. TV cameras and microphones surrounded him. Journalists and TV reporters were bombarding the delegation with their questions. That short quiet interlude in Lauri's life came to an abrupt end. Lauri noticed he was once again a public figure – no longer in North Korea, but in his own country, Finland.

Lauri and the parliament members answered the reporters' questions patiently. Their journey in North Korea, a country that had been closed to foreign visitors, was newsworthy subject matter, for both television and other media. Already on the same evening, Lauri was on the news broadcast, when news commentator Pekka Niiranen interviewed Lauri and the parliament members. The following Sunday the MTV channel, on the Sunday Report, showed long film sequences of the visit to North Korea. With the video camera MTV had lent them, the delegation had filmed many different occasions. In addition Lauri had footage from videotapes made by North Korea's own news reporters. There were also articles about Lauri's journey in various publications over the next few days. Even the small rural papers wrote about the events in North Korea and about the country's dire straits.

\*\*\*

The Finnish television news commentator Pekka Niiranen was with Lauri when he met the North Korean Minister of Culture. When they arrived in North Korea, Niiranen was amazed at the special respect with which the North Koreans treated Lauri Jakkila. When Niiranen had the opportunity, he asked the Minister of Culture Mun Zea Chol directly about the matter. The Minister answered: “Lauri Jakkila will always be treated like a minister of state where he arrives in North Korea.”

\*\*\*

## Lauri - synopsis

In 1999, Lauri Jakkila had a serious stroke in the middle of a speaking tour in Finland. After that he spent the remaining years of his life quietly at home, away from the public eye. Lauri Jakkila died in July 2003.

\*\*\*