I am sorry that I cannot be present at Sirkka-Liisa’s 60th birthday celebrations, but I would like to send my warmest good wishes at this happy event, and to share some of my memories of her. I first met her in April 1998 when I visited Joensuu as part of an academic exchange scheme between the Departments of Mathematics at York and Joensuu. The idea was that a lecturer from each university would visit the other one and deliver a course of lectures in the style of their own university.

It was a shock to move from the mild spring in England to the end of winter in Finland, with walls of snow two or three metres high lining the streets of Joensuu. But Sirkka-Liisa made me feel at home in this strange world: she invited me to her home and made me friends with her three delightful children, she taught me how to do cross-country skiing so that I could go on treks across the lake and through the forest; she even persuaded one of her students to let me drive his snowmobile.

It was probably just as much of a shock for the Joensuu students to encounter my lectures. I gave them a course on Hypercomplex Numbers (i.e. quaternions and octonions), which I had given in York as an eighteen-lecture course over a whole term – two one-hour lectures every week for nine weeks. In Joensuu the students were expected to absorb this material from ten two-hour lectures in just two weeks. I was amazed how well they coped with having this thrown at them. The credit for this must be due to their obvious devotion to Sirkka-Liisa.

I think Sirkka-Liisa expected this alien lecturer to be a distraction from her own mathematical interests, so it was a pleasant surprise to both of
us to find that her own work on Clifford analysis was closely related to some old work of mine on quaternionic analysis. Although my interests had moved away from this area, we were able to keep up a fruitful mathematical dialogue on this visit and on several later occasions. Sirkka-Liisa came to York with her family, and our two families went on outings to the great ruined abbeys in Yorkshire; and I made further visits to Joensuu (on one of which, relaxing from mathematics, I fondly remember being introduced to the Finnish speciality of ice-swimming), and to Tampere.

It is a great pleasure to contribute to this celebration, albeit at a distance. I would like to join in singing

Happy Birthday, Sirkka-Liisa!