

Dressing and dressing by Olli Lamminen

The year was 1972, it was June 22nd and I had just arrived in Ann Arbor, MI. I had been accepted to study at the University of Michigan for MBA. I was 25 years old and I read and wrote English pretty fluently as most University Graduates in Finland did in those days. However, spoken language was a bit bigger issue. In those days Finns were not exposed to the American culture the way it is today with all TV channels, internets, googles, MTVs and so on.

Being 25 years old boy, the first things came first – to buy a car. By noon I had already paid for 1970 Mustang. Getting it registered became a bit of an issue – I needed insurance. By the evening I was a happy new owner of Ford Mustang, had a driver's license and car was registered and insured. I had already left behind several highly confused Americans – when they did not understand my accented English, I took a piece of paper and wrote down in perfect English what I needed to say.

By the evening I started to realize that a steak and a beer would be nice. The problem was that Finnair had lost my luggage and I would not be getting any other clothes before Monday afternoon. I was wearing only Levis and T-shirt. In 1972 you would not walk into a Finnish restaurant serving beer and steaks dressed in T-shirt.

I knew America was more liberal. I ended up parking my Mustang outside Red Bull – its neon sign said Cocktails and Steaks. Exactly what I needed. I waited 5 minutes watching people going in and out and finally spotted young guys dressed in T-shirts. I knew I would be properly dressed.

Waitress showed me to the table and asked if I would like to have a drink. Beer, thanks. She started listing Bud, Milwaukee, Pabst etc. which were all Hebrew to me. I made it simple and said - the first one. Within minutes I had my beer. Life was looking up.

Looking at the menu was another issue. T-bone, New York Strip, Sirloin, Porterhouse... none of which sounded even remotely familiar. Then I spotted Hamburger ¼ lbs with dinner menu.

Waitress understood immediately my order for Hamburger, medium with French fries. My life

was looking easier by the second. Then she hit me – “what about your dressing?”. All this time I had hoped that my lack of better ‘dressing’ (all still with Finnair) would not pose any major issues. I felt embarrassed and humiliated. I tried to explain that all my better ‘dressings’ were lost by Finnair and will be here by Monday and I made a promise to always wear my best dressing for this wonderful restaurant. She started to look a bit confused at my explanations.

“Sir, you misunderstood me, I mean the dressing on your salad”. (I swear that my English teachers had never brought up the word salad dressing in my 10 years of attending English classes). I just heard the words salad, dressing and on. Then it all became very clear to me – I must have had salad on my dressing – that's what she is trying to tell me. I got immediately up from my chair, started wiping salad from my ‘dressing’ and mumbling ‘I am sorry’. Only then I realized that she had not yet brought in any food to my table.

She looked even more confused, left without saying a word. I saw her later talking to several coworkers while pointing to my direction. At the end I did get a salad with something called dressing. Took me several years to gather enough will courage to revisit that same steak house.

Salaattia vaatteilla

Anna Arborissa asuva Olli Lamminen saapui Michiganiin vuonna 1972. Vaikka kielitaitoa oli hankittu koulussa, olivat englannin kielet hienoudet jääneet opettajalta kertomatta – tai Ollilta kuulematta.

Olli saapui tulopäivänään ruokailemaan paikalliseen ravintolaan. Yllään hänellä oli T-paita ja farmarit, muut vaatteet olivat jääneet Finnairin hoteisiin, ties minne. Suomessahan ei noihin aikoihin farmareilla ravintolaan olisi ollut asiaa.

Olli tilasi hampurilaisen. Amerikkalaiseen tyyliin tarjoilija alkoi ”pommittaa” asiakasta erilaisilla peruna- ja salaattivaihtoehdoilla. Lopulta tarjoilija kysyi

”what about your dressing?”. Olli oli oppinut koulussa, että dressing liittyy vaatekseen. Olli selitti, että paremmat vaatteet (dressing) olivat menneet hukkaan lentomatalla. Tarjoilija piti päänsä kylmänä, ja totesi: ”I mean dressing (salaattikastike) on your salad?”. Olli luuli, että hänellä oli salaattia vaatteillaan, ja alkoi vimmatusti pyyhkiä vaatteitaan.

Tarjoilija poistui paikaltaan päätään puistellen. Vähitellen Ollille selvisi, että dressing tarkoittaa sekä salaattikastiketta että vaatekseen – ei salaattikastiketta vaatteilla. Hänellä kesti monta vuotta, ennen kuin hän palasi samaan ravintolaan.

Lahjoituksia



Floridassa asuva Esa Hakala on aktiivisesti kartuttanut instituutin kokoelmia erilaisilla amerikansuomalaisuuteen liittyvillä materiaaleilla. Viime tuomisinaan hänellä oli useita laatikoita kirjallisuutta, erilaisia siirtolaisuuteen liittyviä dokumentteja ja valokuvia. Instituutti kiittää lämpimästi Esaa tärkeästä kulttuuryöstä siirtolaisuuden hyväksi.