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Janne Vitamo
Iowa State University

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A FINNISH COUNTRY BOY AT ISU

I travelled to the United States last spring for the first time in my life. I wasn't sure what to expect. However, I guessed that my idea of America and the American people that was mainly based on TV series, encyclopedias and newspapers, would be different after the practical training period that I was going to take. It was getting dark and the weather was warm and humid, when I arrived at the Des Moines international airport. "You are not going to see the midnight sun and the coniferous forests like in Finland this summer," said Professor Harold 'Sande' McNabb on the way to Ames. He also told me about the black soil of Iowa and the open fields that we were just passing by. Regrettably I couldn't see any of them because of the darkness.

On my first days in Ames, I tried to adapt myself to the 8-hour time difference and to get to know the I.S.U. campus area. As a student of a very new and small university, I was impressed by the old trees, beautiful plantations, and the different kinds of buildings of the large area. Also, the great number of foreign students and the international atmosphere was something new to me.

During the summer, I was working on the research projects of the Department of Forestry. My main advisors were Dr. Hall and Dr. McNabb. I helped, for instance, with the short rotation woody crops project in establishing new plots of poplars in the Iowa State Nursery and at the Rhodes research area. I also worked with Silver Maple on the Amana project both on the field test area and in the greenhouse before planting the seedlings. In July and August, I did some fungal disease ratings in the nursery plots and was also involved with the first established test plot of transgenic trees in the world.

Anyway, I didn't spend the whole summer in Ames. People in the Forestry Department gave me a lot of opportunities to travel and see forestry research outside of Iowa. In July I participated in the Poplar Council of the United States meeting in Mississippi. Down in the South, I could listen to experienced researchers and see some of the fast growing poplar forests on the Mississippi river banks. In late July, I worked in Rosemount, Minnesota where I helped a Swedish researcher make soil tests in the International Energy Agency research plots. In August I rented a car and made a tour of the western states with my girlfriend, who came to see me from Finland. After all this travelling, it is easy to understand why the United States is said to be a big country.

The period of time between the Minneapolis-St Paul airport and Joensuu, Finland covered twenty hours



Janne Vitamo discussing forestry with Dr. Hart.

Time passed quickly, maybe too quickly, and soon I had to leave Iowa for Finland. Leaving the friendly people whom I had got to know wasn't easy. So many people had helped me during the summer and made it easy to adapt myself to the new circumstances. Besides the friendliness of the people, I got to know some of the forestry research that is carried out on the energy plantation. Also my knowledge of English was improved and maybe trying to adapt to another culture has made me more mature. After all, I didn't miss the forests and the light (and often chilly) summer nights of Finland too much. I even learned to like the hot and humid summer weather of the Midwest, especially after I heard that it had been snowing in north Finland in mid July. Among the only things that I didn't get used to was American coffee and the lack of public transportation. Living without a car, which I am used to doing in Finland, did not seem to be possible in Iowa.

I am very glad about the student exchange that has been established between the two universities and also very satisfied with my summer in Iowa. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank both Professor Harold 'Sande' McNabb in Ames and Professor Kim von Weissenberg in Joensuu for making this exchange possible. I also hope the program, which has got off to a good start, will go on with new students being able to make international contacts during their undergraduate days. I also wish my successors from Finland and Iowa all the best.

— Janne Vitamo