

Clinton impressed Faroese youth

In 1988 three young people from the Faroe Islands were fortunate enough to meet the then governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton. The future President was very forthcoming and friendly, they say.

CLINTON

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Jens Olsen, chief executive of the Faroese Fish Market, was in Arkansas, USA, as an exchange student in 1988. This was while Bill Clinton was governor, and one day he had the opportunity to meet the man who was later to become President of the United States.

- My American mom said she was sure that Bill Clinton would become president one day, and she wanted me to go to the Governor's Office and have a picture taken, so that later in life I could say that I had met the American President, says Jens Olsen.

And one hot summer day, accompanied by two Faroese girls, who had come to visit him, Jens Olsen went down to the Governor's Office. The Governor was, of course, busy, and they sat waiting in the hall for a while. Suddenly a door opens, and Bill Clinton steps out followed by two men.



Naina Jacobsen, Bill Clinton, Doris Djurhuus og Jens Olsen. The picture is taken in 1988 when the three young people had a chance to meet a future American president

- We went to greet him, and he was really friendly and took his time to talk to us. He immediately knew where the Faroe Islands were and said that he had been flying over the islands when he was in the Air Force. Naturally, we were both impressed and happy that an American governor knew about our small country, says Jens Olsen.

Hillary impressed the girls. One of the Faroese girls, Naina Jacobsen, says that while they were waiting to see Bill Clinton they went into an adjoining courtroom, and it so happened that Hillary Clinton was the prosecutor in a case of a quarrel between two neighbours.

- She gave the impression of a very professional and tough attorney, says Naina Jacobsen.

Little did they know, however, that they were in the presence of yet another possible future American president.

The year in Arkansas was very important for Jens Olsen, he says, and it has influenced the choices he was made later in life.

- Spending a year in the US taught me to respect people of different cultures and backgrounds. And even though I

was only there for a year, the country is still dear to my heart.

When Jens Olsen thinks of the US, he thinks of his American family. And that is indeed one of the main goals of the student-exchange organisation AFS.

- The organisation was established by some ambulance drivers from World War II, who said that the only way to achieve peace in the world was to get young people to know and understand other cultures and establish personal connections between nations, Jens Olsen explains.

Clinton in the Faroes

Apparently, Bill Clinton has been in Faroese airspace before, and in May this year he was close to visiting the islands. But, weather allowing, today, October 1st, will be the first time the 42nd President of the United States – or any American President for that sake – puts his feet on Faroese ground. And Jens Olsen is hoping to get a glimpse of his former Governor.

- Of course, I would love to meet the President. I was impressed by his presidency, and I am just as impressed with how he has been handling his post-presidency, says the chief executive of the Faroese Fish Market.

Aliens in Arkansas

We landed in Arkansas at around four in the evening, but for us - myself and my friend Samal, it could just as well have been four in the morning. Having traveled for three days, through three different countries, myself having caught a virus, in 30 degrees Celsius, wearing three shirts to many, I did not have the sweet feeling of adventure I had expected. However, I was happy to be done traveling for now. In the car on the way to the school, I looked out the windows. Nothing was as I had envisioned, no high buildings, no blazing and beautiful metropolitan, just a highway, a couple of fast-food restaurants, and miles upon miles of fields: I had landed in Hicksville, I just wasn't aware of it.

On the way to school, we stopped at a Wal-Mart, a gigantic get-everything-you-can-dream-of kind of store to pick up a comforter, pillow and other necessities to get by our first night. When I went to pay, the cashier started to talk to me, asking how I was doing. I had



Faroese students studying at universities in Arkansas. Maria Meinardsdottir og Samal Jakobsen study B.S. in Biology, Annika Høgnadottir studies B.A. in Journalism and Snorri Danielsen studies B.A. in International Business and B.A. in History.

never seen this person before and stammered something about how I was tired, to which she replied that I should try some guarana because that really worked for

her son, who was a truck driver. I was astonished, but Wal-Mart wasn't the only place this happened. Everywhere I went, random people I had never seen

before spoke to me about the weather, school, their trucks, politics, anything, and everything. As the days went by, I got to experience just how different we were. Issues I felt strongly about could be overlooked or misunderstood, sometimes, I got mad, sometimes sad, and sometimes I was just happy to make it through the day. I remember one night looking at the ceiling and wondering why I had traveled halfway across the world. That night, I fell asleep without an answer.

I have been in Arkansas for almost three years now. After a month or two, things started to gradually get easier. I began to fathom the culture of Arkansas, to empathize with their values, and more important, to understand my own Faroese culture; who I was. Today, I love Arkansas, and I wouldn't want to go to school anywhere else. The school is excellent and the knowledge I have gained there is monumental. But my schooling has not only happened in the

classroom. Before I left for America, a girl asked me if I didn't think it was too far away to go. I had told her with great confidence that it was only a plane ticket away. That is not true. America is much further away than that. To come here was like going to another planet where the aliens looked human, but their behavior and way of thinking was completely disparate from my own. It is this diversity which has been my greatest teacher: By living, working, and laughing with humans that are different from me, I have learned that my way of doing things is not always the best way. Diversity is hard, but it is crucial for growth. I am still Faroese, and I will always stick to Faroese values. But now I understand that even we can learn something from the global community: Knowledge that has the potential to continuously transform us into a stronger, wiser, and greater nation.