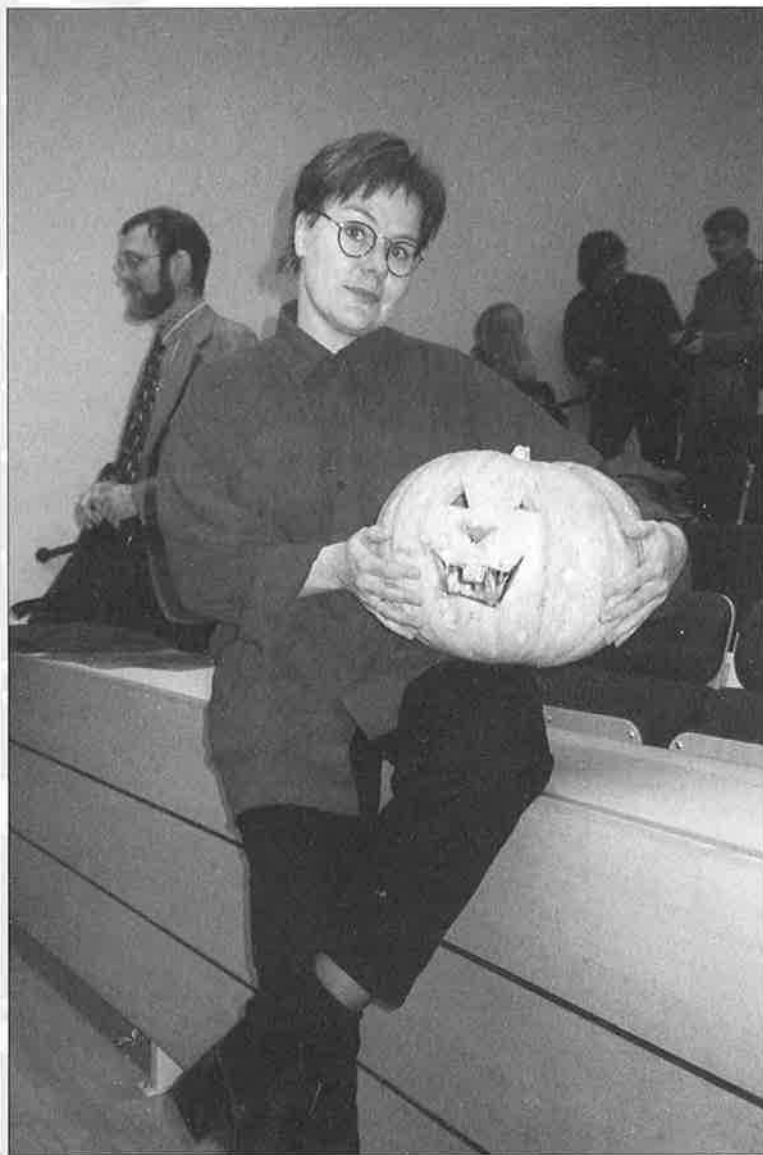


BEHIND A PUMPKIN:

The Sixth American Voices Seminar

University of Turku, North American Studies
October 22-23, 1998

Photo: Iisela Laurila



*Simplest song...there
isn't much to it. All you
gotta do is do-da-lee-
do-it,*

*I like the rest, but the
part I like best goes*

*Do da lee do da lee do,
BOO BOO.*

*(A Popular California Summer Camp
Song)*

Benita Heiskanen*

First things first: the Sixth AMERICAN VOICES seminar was a success. Keith Battarbee, the organizer, managed to do exactly what he had intended in launching these seminars in the early 1990s. North American Studies in Finland, he thought, needed something in addition to the biennial conferences arranged by the Universities of Tampere and Helsinki. The idea was to have a

"The name American Voices was to signify the pluralism of the American society, different voices within it."

somewhat more informal forum where visiting Fulbright professors, lecturers, and graduate students could not only discuss their research interests but—just as importantly—share their everyday experiences in different parts of Finland, simply get to know one another. The name "AMERICAN VOICES" was to signify the pluralism of the American society, different voices within it.

And, indeed, we did hear different voices. The variety of presentations this year was impressive. More typical scholarly topics included James Albrecht and Joycelyn Pollock's politely oppositional treatments of crime in USA today, John LeBaron's discussion of child safety, Janet Levy's experiences with regional differences between the North and the South, and Jeffrey Kaplan's analysis of anti-abortion activism as a form of reli-

gious violence in the USA. Jerry Dollar's introduction to National Parks lightened the tone, and Natasha Seeley added the music, cajoling both Finnish and American participants to blend their voices in a California camp song—all we had to do was do-da-lee-do-it. We did, and it worked!

James Moore went on to show his illuminating slides on Norman Rockwell, Bill Sutherland read from his comic (and prize-winning) novel, *News from Fort God*, Tina Parke-Sutherland shared some of her touching narrative poetry, and Erika Holt et al brought us over the top with a perfect-for-Halloween pumpkin carving competition. We had it all—art, literature, music, serious social science, and pumpkin seeds.

The speakers, as well as the audience—mainly North American Studies students and staff—all had positive

things to say about the overall program. The variety of presentations represented well the differences, the oppositions, the polyphony of today's United States. As Jerry Dollar put it, "the balance between 'good news' and 'bad news'" was just right. And, indeed, Fulbright professors and students did appreciate the event as a venue to share their experiences in different parts of Finland and to see each other again. So, on behalf of the Graduate School for North American Studies, we Thank you, Keith. BOO BOO! ■

*) The writer (in the photo) is the Program Coordinator for North American Studies at the University of Tampere, as well as an ASLA-Fulbright Grantee for 1999-2000.

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