

"Why is it good to live in Estonia?" asked the President on his Facebook account, where he invited his fellow countrymen to consider the positive aspects of our life. However, when the same question was asked of me in the hall of Rosma Johannes School in Põlvamaa, I fell silent for a moment. This question seemed out of place and serious among inquiries such as, "what do you give your child for breakfast?" or "what kind of sports does the President do?" Therefore, I decide to start a little further back. Actually, by talking about a complete stranger, who quite recently made me think about this again...

This man wobbled on his bicycle from Mõisaküla towards Abja-Paluoja – in no hurry! He wore a different uniform and spoke in a strange language. He stopped his bicycle at the door of Abja bookshop, leaned the bike against the wall – not using the lock – and stepped into the cosy atmosphere of the bookshop that smelled of printing ink. The man spent some time there, mostly looking at foreign language books and then – surprise-surprise – took my cookbook to the till to pay for it. But the man had no money on him. Euros are not the currency in his country and on this occasion he had left his bankcard behind. The man looked down, as if apologising, but then he smiled, unexpectedly, and winked at the sales girl. He called 'Visu labu!*' from the doorstep and turned his bike back towards Mõisaküla.

Actually, this man is no stranger to the people of Abja-Paluoja. He can be seen quite often, travelling our streets by bike. He comes from a distance of around ten kilometres and the uniform he wears explains his links with the border services of a neighbouring country. What is it that keeps him returning, again and again? The man has explained that Abja-Paluoja, which features beautiful old wooden buildings and yellow street lamps, is simply very warm and cosy. He likes to pop into the bakery to enjoy a fresh bagel and a cup of coffee, or have a nourishing lunch in a Mulgi pub. He secretly admires the long linen dresses of the waitresses there, cherishing their kind smile and the fact that they have time for him. The pies at Mulgi Pub are always absolutely delicious, made with real farm eggs and the best ingredients from the local dairy, so the man never leaves without having a dessert. In fact, this is dreamlike and the best part of his day, so how could he give it up?

If necessary, the man does his shopping in Abja. Here, one can find several food shops, a flower shop and a general store, stuffed with endless supplies of practical and beautiful home and garden appliances. The man likes to peek through the bank or post office windows, walk down the main street, and look at the busy life from a peaceful distance. He feels happy, looking at small children scurrying between the school and the community centre with their instrument cases, hurrying either to choir, music or band practice. The Latvian man also knows that the local electricity engineer is managing the local troupe of actors in the community centre. He even attended one of their plays once, although to be honest he didn't understand a thing...

This man pedals down this road, regardless of the weather, as this is the most picturesque road, crossing low hills and deep valleys, along the zigzagging base of Sakala primeval valley. The tallest trees grow along this road. And the most beautiful, well tenured fields.

Curious herds of cow are outdoors, regardless of the weather, just like him. They also like it both in spring, as young grass shoots up in the pastures, and in winter, when it is so pleasant to stand in knee-deep snow, snowflakes decorating their ears.

This Latvian man really loves Estonia, and especially this tiny southern fragment of Mulgimaa. Now I am quite sure about it. Because he returned soon after the last time, when he had no money, with his bankcard and took the cooking book back to his home in Latvia. He surely would not have done it, had he not loved our country.

Why is it good to live in Estonia? Well, because of all of these things that I just told you about. Because of the things that the man from a neighbouring country has recognised. And also because this is where your roots are, where you are the strongest, most vibrant and happiest. Provided that you have the skills to realise and sense it.

Happy birthday, my dear home country! Long live Estonia!

* See you soon! (in Latvian language)