

Fienning

I thought I would put a slightly different twist on the Being a Fienning topic by relating to the unusual surname. Alice and I have traveled quite a bit and encountered so many variants in the handling of our name. So the text below is my offering.

Bill Fienning (I am always known as "Bill.")

Having an unusual surname like "Fienning" has some advantages. Since the family always uses different given names (except for Jr.), I am the only William Fienning, as best as I can tell from Internet searches. Having a unique name avoids a lot of possible confusion. That probably simplified the investigation when I was received my (Top Secret level) Q-Clearance.

The only down side is that people read or hear my name and decide that it is something else more common. The name often is turned into "Fleming" or some other variant. There was a problem when tickets for a play were filed under "Sianning." Of course people reading my name usually pronounce it "Fine-ing" or something even less recognizable. I respond to anything that sounds even vaguely like my name, especially if I am waiting for seating at a restaurant. Here in the Southwest, my name gets a Spanish pronunciation: "Fee-aye-ning." The "ie" in Spanish is a diphthong having the sound of "ee-aye." Sometimes I try to educate people that in German, "ie" is a digraph having the single sound "ee." However, this is better than having a name like "John Miller," of which there are at least 100 people with that name in the US.

When Alice and I have been in Germany or Austria, I can simply show clerks my passport, and without hesitancy, they pronounce it correctly. Sometimes I am asked if my name is English or Irish because of the "ing" ending, but few people know that "ing" is also a German ending.