

Fond Memories of the UMUC European Division

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December 2023

Back in my childhood days, like everyone else, the best day of the year was Christmas. My family never had much, but somehow my parents managed to make that one day special enough that the memories of it still linger fondly to this day. For example, my father had an extra job, in addition to his factory work, in which he tended bar at a tavern on weekends. In that capacity, he came to know a man who repaired both juke boxes and pinball machines. I recall that he bought a pinball machine for us for Christmas one year for just \$15 and installed it in our basement. In fixing the money slot so that we did not have to pay every time we played on it, he opened the coin box and got his own unexpected Christmas present in the form of about \$12 in nickels that the repairman had neglected to empty. Life does sometimes surprise us at Christmas in the most wonderful ways.

Back then, the holiday was so much less commercialized than it is today. That just made the surprises under the tree that much more wonderful as we never really knew what gifts each one of us would be receiving. Not to put too fine a point on it, but I believe that children today are bombarded with so many ads that they almost cannot appreciate what they end up with under their trees, thinking about all of the many other gifts that are not there, and which they have seen being advertised on TV, that they have been wishing to find. One present that my parents knew would always do the trick for me was books. I made it very clear from early on that that was where my mind was set. Before I even reached 8th grade, I let it be known that I was going to grow up to be an English teacher, just like the ones who early on inspired me.

As I sit back now and ponder over my long forty-plus year career as an English teacher at the college/university level, I must say that among my fondest memories of that profession I would have to include my seven years from 1968 to 1975 as a vagabond teacher within the UMUC's European Division. Where else could one have found himself teaching on three different continents within a single academic year? Nowhere that I can think of. Yet that was something so natural to this unique job that I actually ended up doing it twice. For example, I could begin the usual school year in September and teach Terms I & II by doing the "splits" in Pirmasens and Sembach in Germany, then be assigned to Incirlik AFB in south-eastern Turkey for Terms III & IV, thereby also avoiding the worst of the German winter weather, and follow that up with being sent down to Kagnew Station in Asmara, Ethiopia, for Term V and hardly bat an eye at what I had been assigned to do. (Talk about long commutes in order to do a job!) That is, until one happens to mention that singular year to later prospective colleagues when applying to teach elsewhere and ends up being looked at like some creature from another planet to those who have spent their entire academic lives in just one spot and were quite pleased with themselves for having done so. As noted in previous memoirs, I was never shy about pulling that special ace out of my sleeve when trying to secure a new job.

Then once having been hired for a position on the faculty at a stateside university, all one sees every day as colleagues are those same individuals who just participated in the hiring process, along with a few others living up and down the long hallway at the school's English Department. That situation would go on for four years when I taught at the UW-Platteville, for example, from 1978 to 1982. To relieve the regularity of seeing the same faces day in and day out, I would escape by going over to the building across the way and hang out with the theater faculty for some variety. So how much different was it with being a Marylander? Well, where else could one have encountered such a wide variety of dedicated talent and from such a varied range of academic disciplines than that which I saw on display in the UMUC European Division?

To start at the very top, there was the division's director, Dr. Joe Arden, who at one point also taught government and history. Anyone who ever met him or who even just heard about him by reputation would have to acknowledge what a distinctly gracious and solid leader he was. I had the rare opportunity to meet him on a more personal level as he was the person who came to my room at the Perapalas Hotel in Istanbul on a Saturday night in June of 1973 to give me the sad news that my father had passed away back in Wisconsin and that I was now being placed on emergency leave to return home for the funeral. He even took the extra kind step of calling ahead to Karamursel where I was teaching to have orders cut and waiting for me when I got back there early the next morning. I also recall another incident involving Dr. Arden when I was teaching at Incirlik AFB in Adana, Turkey. I was confronted one day by the base commander there who informed me that I needed to report to the base barber shop to have my long hair cut. As a GS12 civilian, who had previously gone through four years of that treatment in the army, I refused his command. His response was that he was "going over my head" by calling my supervisor back in Heidelberg. He then told me that Dr. Arden had informed him that he was making a tour of bases in the next two weeks and that when he arrived at Adana he would take care of the problem. On the day when Dr. Arden's plane landed, the base commander was there waiting. When Dr. Arden got off the plane to greet him, it was clear that his hair was at least twice as long as mine. The Incirlik AFB commander then threw up his hands in frustration and never bothered me about my hair length for the rest of my time on his base. Thanks, Dr. Joe! You did indeed take care of the problem.

Another such singular individual was Dr. Julian Jones, who came down to teach International Relations at Kagnew Station in Asmara and who ended up being the best man at my 1971 wedding there. I can honestly say that I got to know him well enough to pull a prank on this well-known prankster on that occasion: I told him that tradition in Ethiopia held that the best man had the distinct honor of drinking the blood of the freshly slaughtered cow that was providing the meat for the wedding feast. He watched in horror as the Ethiopian priest blessed the animal and then calmly slit its throat while positioning a cup to catch some of the blood. The joke may not have lasted long, but for well over ten minutes I really had Julian stammering and turning ashen white at the thought of his next duty. (At this point in my memoir, I would like to call on Dr. Julian Jones to tell the tales of some of his own pranks done on an international scale while teaching for UMUC. I was witness to a couple of them and he told me of others second hand. I leave it to him finally to take up this challenge and now to tell what I think are some of the funniest moments that I ever witnessed or heard about involving him and other Marylander colleagues.) He also accompanied me on a series of DC3 flights around

Ethiopia as we visited Axum, Gondar, Lalibela, Bahar Dar and Addis Ababa together between terms. He even put up with my mad driving skills as I shepherded him up and down the mountain from Asmara to Massawa on the Red Sea in my little red Austin-Healey Sprite convertible. I count Dr. Julian Jones as not only a colleague but also as a long-time friend and mentor.

While I was at Kagnev Station, I also met the inimitable Dr. Ted Sullinger, from whom I took a class in sociology and from whom I also rented the villa on the Greek island of Hydra, which is featured in a couple of my other memoirs. Sadly, Ted passed away a number of years ago, but I still remain long-time friends with his wife Frances, who was the base Education Director at Kagnev Station, and who recommended to me that I begin teaching for UMUC in the first place. That jump start to my long career in education was just what I needed as a stepping-off point for all that I later realized. I trust that Frances Sullinger will do her husband much greater justice than I could ever hope to do here on his behalf by providing some memoirs about him and about her own life on the UMUC circuit.

There are so many other wonderful colleagues from my past years on the circuit that could be added to this panoply of educators who also became friends. One such was surely the late Dr. Bill Berglof, a teacher of astronomy, geology and geography, and his delightful wife Atsuko. All of the glowing tributes to Dr. Bill on this site demonstrate what a profound effect he had on all of the colleagues and students who came under his shadow. I not only knew him from his time in Asmara but I also had the pleasure of visiting him while I was on break and teaching at Karamursel and he and his wife were stationed at Izmir. I stayed at his place for one night and used that opportunity to explore that part of southwestern Turkey, including getting to see Ephesus and its many stunning ruins. Such memories as those linger with me still to this day of a gracious pair of hosts in a distant and exotic land which I will never forget.

Another short-term friendship that I could mention would be the late Jerry Cranford, a Maryland speech teacher with whom I shared the eight-bedroom villa on the Greek isle of Hydra which I have recounted in a couple other memoirs elsewhere. Anyone who got to know this gentle soul understands full well what I am talking about. Our weekends together sharing food and drink (and ghosts) can only be recalled now some fifty-plus years later. When I made a couple of return visits to Hydra in the years since our stay there, I did go back to that villa and let my thoughts drift back to Jerry Cranford and his passing. He was also a very good friend of Frances Sullinger and she may be able to tell even more stories about their friendship and of his being a godfather to her daughter Clare.

One more favorite teacher couple that I encountered at both Kagnev Station and at Incirlik AFB was Mike Reiter, who taught law and philosophy for UMUC, and who was accompanied by his lovely wife Holly. They happened to be good friends with Dr. Julian Jones, so my introduction to them was an easy one. However, back in those days of the early 1970's, one had to be quite wary of befriending Julian, because this die-hard prankster was constantly on the lookout for victims of his crazy schemes. Let it be said that the Reiters were sometimes easy targets. But to be fair, they also did their best to reciprocate; and because Marylanders by nature were vagabonds who bounced around from one country to another every few months, the opportunity to set elaborate traps for one another often carried on across the three

continents that comprised the European Division. It is not my place to do any more than say that I was privy to some of this back-and-forth mischief. . Further, on one visit that I made to see Julian and Taru in Istanbul at the Perapalas Hotel, I was made aware by Julian that Mike Reiter had somehow gotten back on his friend with a prank that he devised and timed for just the right moment. If one is going to dish it out, one had better be willing to be victimized as well. Bottom line is that Mike and Holly Reiter were a fun couple that I felt fortunate enough to encounter on multiple occasions during my tenure as a Marylander. I do know that they took full advantage of the free weekend MAC flights out of Incirlik AFB, as I also did. I believe that they even got to go to Israel on one of them. Thinking once more of them brings back so many delightful memories of the wonderful personnel who were part of this program.

I would also add another English teacher with whom I have unfortunately lost contact named Robin Schorr when he was teaching at Kaiserslautern. I met him while I was teaching in Germany at Pirmasens in 1971 and he left enough of an impression on me that I gave his first name as a middle name to my son Christopher. And yes, Chris has since suffered the resulting jokes for fifty years now. (If anyone knows the whereabouts or contact information for Robin Schorr, I would much appreciate it.)

One more person that I would like to highlight here, among the many I was fortunate enough to meet and be privileged to know, was the late Dr. Robert Speckhard, the UMUC English Department Coordinator, who was directly responsible for sending me all over Germany and beyond to Karamursel, Adana and Asmara, the latter station on multiple occasions for long stretches in that secret garden spot of the European Division. I cannot thank him enough. I would only raise one slight objection about him, not entirely his fault, just a matter of some bad timing, in that once when I came to his office in Heidelberg, he told me, "You should have been here five minutes ago. Then you could have met the author of this new book which she just signed for me." The book was *Fear of Flying*. So yes, thanks Dr. Bob, for letting me know that I just missed meeting Erica Jong!

A final source of fond memories has to include all of the crazy travel adventures that went with being on the circuit for the European Division. In the stateside years of my career, my two-day weekends were pretty tame, and so were those of my colleagues, as I found out in our regular Monday morning chit-chats. Sometimes I just curled up with a good book and unwound that way when I did not happen to have a bevy of student essays to grade. My teacher friends would relay that on their weekends they played with their kids or grandkids, perhaps watched some sports, or if the mood struck might go off to a nearby lake or river and do a little fishing, or perhaps play some golf. Nothing very exotic, except for maybe a big extended family dinner over the holidays. However, while I taught for the European Division, my weekends were always over three days in length. So the wonderful train system out of Germany often found me on the Thursday night run out of K'town to Paris. Having the City of Lights at my feet was always thrilling no matter what mood I happened to be in. Also within easy reach were other major sources of foreign excitement such as Amsterdam, Brussels, Zurich or Vienna. Between terms, when there were ten days to roam freely, one could easily take in Copenhagen, Rome, Madrid or London. I even got to experience the rowdy and boozy Oktoberfest in Munich on two separate occasions. Thus, I became familiar and comfortable enough with travel in Europe that it later led me to become an academic tour guide for over thirty years. I know that I was not

alone in taking full advantage of these opportunities. Fellow Marylanders have related some of their exploits to me, such as taking the troop train up to West Berlin. Others enjoyed going skiing in the Swiss Alps. Dr. Julian Jones once told me that he used his time off to secure a visa and cross over from Turkey into Syria to visit Damascus. (I believe that he was joking when he also reported that the only annoyance on that trip was having to pose for the required genital profile.)

Beyond that slight inconvenience, and for further exotic travel available while with the European Division, I could recount my trips out of Kagnew Station to places like Khartoum in the Sudan, where I had the opportunity to stand at the very confluence of the Blue Nile and the White Nile. I also took a guided tour of Israel for ten days. Perhaps those trips will be explored in further detail in future memoirs. I have already recounted many other such travel opportunities to Massawa, Yemen and Djibouti in some of my previous memoirs. But adding it all together, there was no more personally educational academic position that I have ever held that could hold a candle to my time with UMUC and the far-flung European Division. By covering three continents, meeting so many other talented colleagues from such a large variety of academic disciplines, and having seven years of first-hand exposure to so many various foreign cultures, I believe that I came away a much more well-rounded and mature teacher who was then able to take on and handle any duty that was given to me. The fond memories of those wonderful days still linger. As I have told many of my students who accompanied me when I did those travel programs for over thirty years, one can learn much from books, but nothing beats the first-hand experience of being on the ground and encountering the world in person. I am grateful for every experience that I ever had, whether pleasant or difficult. All of them have shaped me into the person and teacher that I have become. As the late Bob Hope might be wont to say, at least in part, "Thanks for the memories, UMUC."

Merry! Merry! Happy! Happy!