

Teaching and Living in Turkey (1974-77) - A Tribute to a Field Rep Extraordinaire

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The year is 1974. The location is Adana, in south central Turkey. My previous teaching assignment in Karamürsel, another US/Turkish military site where Maryland sent a steady flow of faculty, had been pretty cushy. Karamürsel, on the Sea of Marmara within striking distance by ferry of Istanbul, was considered far more cosmopolitan than provincial, untamed Adana. Adana's Turkish-US airbase actually was in the village of Incirlik, a few miles from the town. The base Education Center was housed in an indistinguishable Quonset hut.

“Merhaba Professor Weatherford!” Elaine Nollet, the University of Maryland European Division Field Representative, greeted me with open arms from where she stood behind her desk. She stepped forward, still grinning broadly. “We’re thrilled to see you! Enrollments in your archaeology class are going great, it’s nearly full.” I detected a slight Maine accent, the state to which her grandparents immigrated when leaving Lebanon decades earlier. Elaine’s love for all things Middle Eastern blended with her intense commitment to education and continuous learning. As with other faculty before and after me, Elaine (these days called Lainey) served as a cultural ambassador as well as Maryland administrator, enhancing our lives as teachers and temporary residents of Turkey.

For Lainey standing rather than sitting behind her desk was commonplace, more convenient for multi-tasking. She was in perpetual motion, promoting courses, counseling and enrolling students, lending a hand to faculty dropping off exams and syllabi to be copied, meeting and greeting new faculty. (I did find her sitting at her desk on weekends, however, working pro bono to catch up on Maryland tasks impossible to accomplish during weekday interruptions.) Lainey asked me where I was staying (“the BOQ for now”), did I need help with my baggage and boxes (“no thanks, I’m good”), had I tried Turkish food yet (yes, and I love it!), would I like to go to Adana for lunch and then do a bit of shopping in the bazaar (does the Pope pray?!).

Before we left for lunch, Lainey told me that one of her Turkish friends (she had many), was the Director of the Adana Regional Archaeology Museum. His name was Aytug Tasyürek. My ears perked up. Perhaps Aytug could be a useful contact for class field trips...? “Yes, of course!,” Lainey said.

But her resourcefulness went further. “If you’d like to live on the economy in Adana, be closer to Turkish culture, Aytug may be able to arrange for you to stay at the old Ethnography Museum in the center of town. The museum closed when the new regional museum opened. There are plenty of unused rooms there, a few on the second floor with a terrace, overlooking ancient sarcophagi and marble columns. You will need to shower with a garden hose but there *is* a toilet.” PERFECT. We agreed to go by and see the place after lunch. Off we went.

Lainey knew the ropes. We barely made it beyond the Incirlik Base gate before a cadre of carpet and camel bag dealers approached us urging Lainey to have a cup of tea and see their new merchandise. There was hardly a Turkish textile or copper vendor in the region who didn't call her by first name. And her familiarity with Adana's best hole-in-the-wall restaurants was legendary. Surely dozens of Maryland faculty can still taste the hot flatbread, köfte, yogurt and stuffed grape leaves eaten at a döner kebab stand with only a counter and a few wobbly stools.

After lunch we dropped by the old Ethnography Museum. It was exactly as Lainey described. My prospective room was large and airy. I would share it with mounds of kilims (flat-woven rugs) and shelves of ceramics and vessels full of Phoenician beads, part of the antiquity collection stored at the old museum. The Incirlik base bus stopped a few blocks away. Best of all, Aytug, was welcoming, generous, and delighted to have me stay there for the duration of my teaching assignments.

I also relied on Lainey's inventive ideas for beyond-the-classroom student experiences. Lainey had explored many archaeology sites within two hours of Adana. Her site recommendations and connections to Turkish archaeologists on the Adana Museum staff were invaluable. Two or three weeks into the term, my archaeology students were loading into cars for a slightly terrifying drive to Anavarza. We scrambled up a steep rocky hillside to see a 12th century A.D. castle and rampart built on a magnificent mound first occupied by the Romans. Huffing and puffing, students made it unscathed across some scary traverses to reach the top, returning to Incirlik with plenty of notes and photographs for class research papers.

Next was Karatepe, an Iron Age (12th century BC) Neo-Hittite site in the Taurus Mountains. A little farther away from Adana than Anavarza, students didn't mind the equally intimidating drive to reach Karatepe's ancient city ruins since they are located in the Taurus Mountains, where cool air and welcome breezes offered respite from scorching Adana heat. Lainey's role as my unofficial teaching assistant guaranteed that students would get a marvelous deal on exquisite Karatepe kilims from vendors near the open-air museum before we departed.

But most unforgettable was Lainey's trailblazing idea for one-hour, lunch-time field trips. Lainey's excitement when I dropped by the Ed Center one morning alerted me that she had a plan brewing. I arrived just after Aytug had phoned to tell us that a family of nomadic Yörüks were camped outside the base. It was late autumn, the time when Yörüks move by camel caravan, loaded with woven bags filled with the nomads' possessions, from the high Anatolian plateau to winter in warmer lowlands. I don't quite remember the details of Lainey's plan, but knowing her gift of spontaneity and talent for coordination, it may well have been that very afternoon when Aytug met Lainey and me, along with a handful of adventurous students, at the base gate before heading to the Yörük encampment. Aytug took lead, with Lainey close behind. After introductions the Yörüks didn't hesitate to invite us into their tent home for tea and yogurt. Sitting cross-legged in a circle on the floor, a sun-weathered woman placed a large bowl of fresh yogurt in the center for all of us to share. Lest the reader worries too much about hygiene, we *were* each given a separate spoon!

Lainey and the Nollet family—father Dave, daughters Lisa and Lori and son Johnny—became and remain good friends of mine. Their house on the Incirlik base became an oasis for American

and Turkish military and civilians. The door was always open. Naturally inclusive, Lainey's friends ranged from high-ranking brass to enlisted airmen to DoD schoolteachers to, of course, Maryland faculty. Lisa and Lainey both took my archaeology course (never relying on our friendship, they worked twice as hard to earn high grades!). When I returned to Turkey in 1975 to teach another term or two in Adana, Dave found me a modest cement house steps from the base entrance into which he and his minions moved a gigantic American refrigerator, a small desk, some chairs and a cot. I hit the ground running, ready to teach.

The class field trips (also described in the memoir piece, "It all started when..."), were some of the most beneficial I could offer curious, intrepid students in the University of Maryland European Division during my years as faculty (1972-77). The Nolleys now live in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, down the road from where my spouse and I live in Maine. It's easy to visit them, especially Lainey whose beautiful old house overlooking the water near Portsmouth, New Hampshire, is less than an hour drive from Portland. Lainey continues to serve her community as a willing and capable cultural ambassador, museum program coordinator and educator and historic preservation advocate, undoubtedly enhancing the lives of those she touches in the same way she enhanced the lives of Maryland students and faculty during the 1970s in Turkey.

