

It All Started When...

Claudine Weatherford—July 2020

I left California in December 1971, heading to the Soviet port of Nakhodka where I boarded the Trans-Siberian Railway. Tucked in my backpack were a resume listing a newly minted master's degree in anthropology and a notebook with potential international job contacts. One ad, culled from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, stood out: Hiring Overseas Faculty. The ad was posted by the University of Maryland European Division, headquartered in Heidelberg, Germany.

Germany seemed like a reasonable destination. I knew that days on the Trans-Siberian eating fish heads and boiled eggs (until eggs ran out), followed by a month in Moscow's unheated hostels wheezing from coal polluted air, would be grueling. In contrast, Germany would be luxurious. Moreover, during a journey to Prague in 1969, I met and stayed in touch with a German-American artist who lived in West Berlin. He invited me to visit when next in Europe. I could camp out in his graphics design studio while I checked out teaching opportunities or until I decided to press on to Heidelberg, hat in hand, to drop off a resume at the Maryland office. The post-war Allied-Axis divvy created American, British and French occupations in West Berlin where jobs ranging from cashiers to jeep mechanics could be found. Surely, I could scare up enough work to keep me going while I looked for a *real* job. I gladly left (fled!) freezing Moscow, flew to Tempelhof Airport and ensconced myself in my friend's studio on a sofa next to a massive lithography press.

On a gray February day in 1972 I made my way to Dahlem, the West Berlin neighborhood where most American military and civilian government employees lived and worked. I found the stucco building where the University of Maryland European Division had an office. I climbed the stairwell to a top floor loft and knocked on the open office door. The Maryland field representative (aka Field Rep), a blond, fit, preppy-looking guy (I believe a former Army lieutenant) sat behind the desk. His friendly, welcoming demeanor was encouraging. I asked him about teaching jobs and, lo and

behold, he said he was looking for an anthropology lecturer to teach a sixteen-week introductory course scheduled to begin in August. Talk about luck! The relaxed timeline gave me a few months to prepare course lectures. Definitely a plus. But I needed to survive until my first Maryland paycheck arrived. In those days pay checks were issued in a lump sum at the end of the term after grades were submitted. In my case, due to a sixteen-week term (most terms met twice a week for eight weeks) that meant no check until November. Ugh. Welcome to the world of part-time lecturers. I needed to swallow my pride, get creative and survive for several months. Fortunately, lots of American and British families needed their houses cleaned, kids nannied and dogs walked. A Maryland English Composition lecturer, married to a Foreign Service poobah, hired me to serve hors d'oeuvres at frequent cocktail parties. My clientele grew quickly.

From the graphics studio I moved to a cordoned-off cot-sized corner of a run down but bustling pension, owned by an eighty-something Frau Heppner who offered me the corner in exchange for early morning bakery runs and taking her ancient "Auntie" to the park for a daily bit of fresh air. Nearby the German-American Cultural Center's library served as a quiet spot to pull together resources for my much anticipated anthropology course. I got to know a few more part-time Marylanders living on the economy. All encouraged me to get to know our unique location.

Curious about East Berlin, I began exploring the Soviet sector on the other side of the Wall. I met quite a few East Berliners during those forays. Against wiser instincts I began sneaking Western goods through Check Point Charlie and delivering messages between separated relatives. East Berliners desperately wanted pantyhose so I wore several pairs of the contraband items every time I crossed the heavily-patrolled border. Far riskier, I returned with notes and photographs stuffed in my underwear from relatives eager to reconnect with family members in the West. I did get stopped and searched once. Fortunately, the stern East German border guard didn't frisk me, only my ruck sack. Eager to nab me—frequent trips were beginning to look suspicious—the guard found a *Time* magazine. "Ah ha!" she said, removing it with dramatic flourish. "It

has been confiscated!” My thick leggings and letter-augmented bustline escaped her scrutiny. What on Earth was I thinking! My Maryland career nearly ended before it began.

After a few months with Frau Heppner and Auntie, I moved to a windowless, squat room above a pet shop. I could just barely stand up in the room, and the narrow ladder to the downstairs toilet was daunting. I commuted by bicycle several miles each day on Dahlem’s bumpy cobble stone streets traveling back and forth between odd jobs in the American sector, keeping myself visible to the Maryland field rep, and prepping course materials at the Cultural Center. Unfortunately, hanging around the Maryland rep’s office to pick up teaching tips and socialize didn’t qualify me for a highly coveted US ID card, meaning I didn’t have access to prized American resources like the base library and PX. The odd jobs got me through the summer and fall. It was embarrassing, however, when I finally walked into my first Maryland class in August to learn that a house I cleaned and three dogs I walked that day belonged to one of my Anthro students!

By the spring of 1973, I was happily teaching as a Maryland part-timer. The classes were eight weeks long, instead of sixteen, which meant more frequent pay checks. Often class enrollments were large enough to split a class into two sections and double my pay. The students were terrific—curious learners, grateful for the military’s college benefits and always game for field trips. Hallelujah! An adventurous anthropologist’s/archaeologist’s dream job. Yet, after a year in Germany, I grew restless. Living above hamsters and parakeets in the pet shop’s garret along with gray, rainy days lost its charm. By this time, I knew a handful of Maryland annual contract faculty who traveled all over Europe and beyond. They talked enthusiastically about their assignments in other locations, especially warmer, drier ones. I relocated to Spain and began teaching at USAF air bases at Torrejón and Zaragoza. Committed to getting around without owning a car, I spent as many hours on the round-trip bus ride between Madrid and Torrejón as I did in the classroom teaching each week. The same can be

said of the twice-weekly commute to and from Zaragoza, made easier by hitching a ride with the Air Force mail truck.

My 1973-74 Maryland term assignments included a summer stint in Greece at the Athens Airport/US-Greek military base and in Marathon, a small installation at Nea Makri. The Nea Makri assignment required a bus and two trains—close to five hours round trip—twice a week. For the Athens assignment, I walked in 100-plus degree heat back and forth from Glyfada, the village where I lived, to the Athens base education office and classrooms. Always helpful, ed office staff let us use a spare desk and typewriter to prepare our class materials. I can still smell the pungent blue ink from the mimeograph machine used to print syllabi.

My students in Greece were particularly special. Four of my anthropology students lived in the same Glyfada apartment building that I did. They were really great guys; very friendly, sharp as tacks and astute students. All were US Air Force linguists. Open and convivial, we spent time together talking about their families, life and education goals, as well as listening to riveting Watergate testimony broadcast on the Armed Forces radio channel. Nevertheless, about one aspect of their lives they were super secretive. They would never tell me what languages they spoke. Occasionally, they would not be in class because of temporary duty elsewhere, called TDY. TDY absences were hardly unusual among our military students and the orders openly noted locations where soldiers were sent. Not so for the linguists. Only a terse note signed by a superior. Much later I learned their MOS was Hebrew. Their TDYs were spent flying over Israel. We were spying on our allies!

During my Greece assignments, a tall, lanky, earnest fellow dressed in a magnificent wide-lapel suit and colorful tie showed up from Heidelberg, the European Division's mother ship, to observe and evaluate my classroom performance. That dapper fellow was Dr. Joe Arden. Joe was already a legend-in-his-own-time and current Area Director for the Mediterranean region. Classroom visits by higher-ups were routine, though always taken seriously by faculty. I certainly took them seriously. I loved my job

and was eager to show Joe my teaching chops. Eagerness quickly turned to anxiety, however, because the timing of Joe's visit overlapped with an unfortunate mistaken identity incident that I thought would get me fired from Maryland and banned from military bases forever. Some context is needed.

For several weeks, a low-level soldier had been tailing me—unknown to me—in the Athens base PX. His detail was to note my purchase of Mexican food supplies (the tortillas, I remember, were canned!). I was living at the time with a Chicano whose Mexican mom taught him to cook fabulous Mexican dishes. Since we were both ardent fans of enchiladas with rice and beans, we ate them often. Just before Joe landed in Athens, the base education officer summoned me to his office for a stiff reprimand regarding the impounding of my Maryland ID by Air Force Security for illegally selling PX Mexican food on the Greek economy. The ed officer was reporting me to the University of Maryland in Heidelberg, and I should consider my teaching job terminated. I was dumbstruck. Regaining composure, I pulled out my ID and showed it to the officer. His turn to be dumbstruck. If not my ID card, whose was impounded? Who was the doppelganger causing confusion and framing me as a criminal? I was mortified and didn't know how much Heidelberg knew about the accusations. Surely Dr. Arden was visiting my class to fire me. He didn't. Eventually I found out that a US embassy spouse was operating a small-time syndicate buying hard-to-get Mexican food supplies and reselling them, largely to ex-pats not eligible for PX privileges. And eventually, Joe—who remains my favorite boss ever and a dear friend—offered me a coveted annual contract.

Lucky to remain in the Mediterranean following two terms in Greece, the annual contract teaching assignments in the mid-1970s took me to Turkey and Italy and back to Spain (including beautiful Rota!). Those largely flat landscapes were perfect for the fold-up bike I bought at a PX and carried with me on mammoth C5 planes that hauled enormous cargoes of jeeps and buses, along with a few passengers. To this day, I relish the moniker “backpack scholar” (or “gypsy scholar”) to describe how many of us

Marylanders honed and even cherished the ability to write lectures and grade papers while en route somewhere via bus, metro, train or plane.

By far the most gratifying and beneficial part of teaching in the Mediterranean region (“the Med”) was discovering the splendid fit between anthropological and archaeological field trips and in-class lectures. In Spain, Italy, Greece and Turkey, we were surrounded by historic sites, digs and museums, offering first-hand ethnographic and archaeological opportunities and, hence, enriched learning experiences. Wow, I thought, this job gets better and better! Students and I toured and studied Upper Paleolithic cave paintings in Spain, world famous museums and excavated sites in Italy, and dozens of Greek, Roman and Byzantine sites in Turkey—all breathing life into dry textbook descriptions and classroom lectures. In Adana, Turkey, we rented buses or coordinated car fleets for students (and their families—a delightful addition) to participate in archaeological surveys, museum collection projects, and weekend trips where we were dropped off when the road ended and continued by foot. We stayed in traditional Kurdish villages and rode donkeys to less-accessible ancient monuments and sanctuaries. Perhaps the most memorable experience was the windy 4:00 am trek up to First Century BC Nemrut Dağ, the royal tomb and statuary for Antiochus I in Southeastern Turkey. Chilled to the bone, not one student complained. It was all worth it when they saw the sun rise through Nemrut Dağ’s enormous stone heads. In fact, seeing students *enjoy* roughing it while learning about anthropology and archaeology was a rewarding fringe benefit of teaching. One young, quite proper, city-bred female soldier told me how proud she was of mastering a new skill—peeing in the woods during a rest stop!

Fast forward. There’s never been an extended period since it all started in the early 1970’s that I haven’t worked for, or been closely involved with, the institution now called the University of Maryland Global Campus. After several years in the European Division (1972-77), I returned to the US and back to graduate school teaching part-time for the University of Maryland University College (UMUC) in Adelphi and College Park, and at the Pentagon and other military installations and government agencies in and

near Washington, D.C. From the 1980s until 2017, I worked off and on for UMUC. During those years I served as an Assistant Dean, coordinator of new degree programs, online course developer, course chair, and a classroom and online faculty member. Teaching University of Maryland's adult learners formed the warp of my professional life, underpinning and helping to shape and influence my career development for decades. Truth be told, what sets my experience apart—what makes it my great good fortune, indescribably meaningful and enduring—is the people, many of whom remain in my life today. Colleagues, students and staff, drawn together by a desire for an education, circumstance or their sense of adventure to our niche mission offering education opportunities beyond the walls of traditional learning. Little did I know back in December in 1971 how gratifying and exhilarating the journey would be!

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