

Being There

Dennis Gwynn
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The Catch-22 of finding work in the 1970's was to find work, you needed you needed a phone. For a place to have the phone you needed a residence but to have a residence, you needed an income which came from the job you were searching for. The problem was a result of cheapening biology education by increasing lecture size to 700 students. This required about 20 graduate assistants to provide some human interaction. Thus the job market was reduced by 95%. The 5% of jobs had so many qualified applicants that they were passed around between friends. I looked outside this system and found work teaching botany in Kenya but the pay was so low that I returned to the USA after sixteen months.

With a fresh degree and a year's experience but needing a job, I stayed with my wife's family. Her father, nearly deaf, could hear the phone ring but not the voices so he would usually lift the handset up, shout into it and slam it down in frustration, breaking the connection. Fortunately, two weeks before Julian called, I had wired a phone extension upstairs to my wife's quarters. When Julian called, I was happy to hear that I was about to have a free airplane ride. I visited the Smithsonian museum, interviewed with Maryland and was hired to teach in Asia.

The University College, offered those able to adapt an unconventional life delivering, traditional in-person classes superior to cheap huge mass lectures and programmed education. Like the Foreign Legion, we ended up in distant places with unfamiliar languages. In both it was expected we would not be encumbered with a family so normal life was given up and we better overcame conditions which were sometimes less than easy. The entertainment value of our life was extraordinarily high and as in the Legion, we knew better than to screw up this chance at something extraordinary.

Overseas Maryland combined the chance for real travel, fascinating military equipment, interesting places, pleasant students and we taught 3 hours per day 4 days a week in the evening when there was little of interest to do. There was no requirement for research, grant applications or writing papers that few would read. We would concentrate our efforts on what was important, teaching. Teaching for Maryland was my dream come true.

Applying for a Marine Corps permit to operate a movie projector, I mentioned that I was on permanent TDY with an eight-week rotation, A Marine replied "And we thought we had it tough". It was not tough at all; it was exactly what I wanted to do.

In our first faculty meeting when I said moving from place to place was normal for me and I looked forward to it...there was laughter by several who would not stay with

Maryland as they could not fit the needs of mobile teaching. They left and we who fitted stayed on and on.

I had left careers in medicine, engineering and high school teaching as they were not appropriate for me. Being a traveler somewhat in the Paul Theroux sense, I was fortunate to hear Julian's call for gypsy scholars. Julian's enthusiasm was well warranted as by design, the Maryland overseas teaching program had many positive elements and it excluded all of the negative ones.

Joe Arden's diligence, focused on what really mattered, was crucial to making our teaching effective. We could see that Joe cared about our wellbeing and we were grateful for his attention to it. He resisted changes that undermined the role of the faculty and therefore the program. I am grateful that administrators took care of the stressful boring things needed to make our program function. We were fortunate to have the freedom and responsibility to teach well in places which if not universally delightful, were certainly entertaining.

In the 1980s our teaching program gradually changed from one in which we traveled to one in which we commuted. Traveling was an enjoyable plus but commuting, both trying and enervating, was a big minus. I assume that this change was to pacify those with no desire for the stimulation of new places. Joe wisely resisted those who wanted to "homestead" as it narrowed our course offerings and was unfair when a few hogged favorite places. Travel was great but commuting had nothing in common with travel.

I became increasingly unhappy driving across the same bridge five times one afternoon commuting through Seoul to teach my class at West Casey. That afternoon, I learned that a Korean taxi driver must give you directions to save face, but it is not necessary for the directions to be correct. A compass immediately solved the problem of crossing a city filled with useless signs and face saving but clueless drivers.

Riding the Mung Jin bus was even worse than driving as we usually stood an hour in the packed bus to second division. So I staged a photo shoot showing two of us with our faces and a hot dog for dinner all mashed against the bus window. On seeing the photo, Larry laughed and said he would adjust the schedule so we would not have to commute across Seoul.

After teaching several years, I was told that "unlike most of the others I had not changed". There was no reason to change as my teaching was exactly what I wanted to be doing. The turnover rate of lecturers was high not because of any program shortcoming but because there would always be those who could not easily adapt to what was needed of them. On the other hand, I would not be happy away from the adventure of our innovative, roving, teaching life in which we could benefit from local resources.

Asia's fish markets are a remarkable resource for biology teaching. I bought otherwise hard to find anglers and rays along with squid and clams to enrich my classes with dissections in

comparative anatomy. There were some surprises too. Once we walked out on the reef and brought back a big fat sea cucumber for dissection. This animal looking like a two-foot-long black radiator hose had the disgusting defense of blowing out its internal organs as a sacrifice for a predator to eat. You can guess how that dissection went.

Squid merchants would ordinarily yank off the heads and discard the internal organs unless carefully instructed not to do so in their own language. That problem only happened once as I had to eat the 14 demolished squid before they spoiled and purchase 14 intact squid. The squid vendor was murmuring and shaking her head when I walked away with intact squid the second time. Sometimes we cooked the squid for students to better "internalize" their lesson.

Science labs are a safe place the student can experiment without getting into trouble. At Osan we dissected squid Friday evening in the base commanders briefing room. As usual I asked a student to discard the squid remnants. Unfortunately, he put them in a men's room wastebasket where they smelled up headquarters for two days before anyone entered the building with a sensitive western nose. Ed Romery was told to call me in and explain the problem. He thought it was outrageously funny. I liked Ed.

Ed's office had a canary cage. I found some tiny speckled quail eggs in the market and bought them to put in with the canaries. The Ed Center staff was thrilled to see the little egg in with the canaries so they looked up all manner of canary lore. On the "hatching day", when no one was around, I put a second egg into the cage. Ed somehow knew I had done it and put a "thank you for the ride" note in my box.

Our teaching was sometimes called a "Peace Corps" life. (The Peace Corps accepted me 3 times.) Those who enjoyed a carefree mobile life continued teaching, often for decades as teaching was enjoyable. Persons wanting a different life gravitated into administration with its stresses, 8-hour work days and city life. To an outsider, it seemed that they gave up the very best of what Maryland offered. At least one returned to teaching.

It is said that a teacher never forgets their first students. My first Maryland Far East Division classes for Maryland were at unforgettable Misawa.

Misawa, located at sea level had a mountain top's climate, it even had a ski slope which made up in snow what it lacked in size. Misawa's location explained its weather and its weather explained why the small and scrubby trees were clinging to life. Buildings were painted white to blend in with the snow. There was the weekly earthquake, comforting as it was releasing the earth's pressure in small amounts. Navy people who did not want to be at sea loved Misawa. Misawa was popular for those of us wanting to teach many classes. Teaching extra classes at a lower pay rate made no sense as I, being the only mobile science teacher, was my only competition. Why work at discounted pay when I could return to teach the same class later at the regular rate?

We had excellent support. Visiting the base clinic cost very little and we could eat out fill at the

dining hall every morning. At my request, a peach omlette was made for me; however, the peach caused the cooking grille to stick. There were several Japanese swear words but he smiled broadly and gave me the innovative peach omlette. The librarian and her assistant were wonderful. They closed the library to see Lucy and me off when we departed Misawa.

Education Services Officer Bill Berlin was an enthusiastic Maryland booster. Joe Arden called saying he envied us in Misawa as Tokyo was hot and humid that August. I did not envy Joe in Tokyo, it was a city but Misawa was isolated, even the ice cream was 4 months past its expiration. A few times I went to the nearby beach and looked homeward across the ocean feeling lost.

Joe cared enough to ask Lucy Schultz to help keep our morale up. One afternoon I entered my room and found a young woman asleep on my bed. Bemused, I sat down nearby and waited to see what would happen. On awaking she explained that the Navy scheduled her on odd hours so she was sleepy. She was in Lucy's class and had asked if Lucy knew any nice men. So Lucy helped. Unfortunately, I was too proper to take unfair "advantage" of a sleeping woman and not much happened. If she had a big red bow around her with a card saying "for you" I would have understood. Thoughtful Lucy...

Misawa student Mike Speigel was memorable. Mike was straight out of Catch 22. Mike explained how he became "Milo Minderbender". His small shop maintained mining pylons for Orion patrol planes. He ordered a 5 gallon can of cleaning solvent. When the solvent arrived the driver asked if there was a forklift for it. Mike said "No, just put it down by my desk". The driver replied "come look at the truck and you will understand". The Navy had delivered a cargo truckload of 55-gallon drums of solvent and they would not take it back. Mike took a week running all over the base swapping away the solvent. After that, it was "if you needed anything ask Mike".

Mike ran a small three-man, award-winning shop. Their month's work could be done in three days so they waxed the floor, put curtains on the windows and spent the rest of the month studying for their Maryland classes. Mike explained his presence in the Navy: After serving out his initial enlistment, the only work he could find was in a laundry, so he re-enlisted in the Navy. Mike is a study in military resourcefulness.

Japan was crowded but some of the trains were jammed. All a western standee could see was the tops of a sea of heads. Bored, I sometimes fell asleep standing. One morning I slept soundly on a circular route and awakened an hour later unhappy to find that I was right back where I had begun my Tokyo train commute. Stations were announced with a "ding" and a soft melodious voice. "Iwakuni, Iwakuni des" would awaken me in time to grab my shoes and dash out the door in my stockings. Trains in Japan and Korea ran on a double track system so if you were lost just exit the train, cross the platform and ride back to known territory. Japan was organized so that one door admitted riders and a different door let riders exit.

It is assumed that subject mastery is sufficient to teach college students so there is no preparatory instruction on how to properly go about teaching. Understanding educational psychology and teaching methods is fundamental to good teaching and also to the designing of classes. Lecturers oblivious to the constraints of attention span held overlong classes with insufficient breaks so they could go home early. To keep student's minds alert they needed to understand that attention begins to fade after the first fifteen minutes of a lecture.

Interested in Second World War history, I sat in on a weekend class on that topic. We had normal breaks but they were not enough. At the second break, I sought a tall student near the back of the class to hide behind and get some rest. In the next break, I left not to return. A class is wasted time if you cannot stay awake.

Jim told me he had taught a class in which his students could look to one side to see women dancing in the NCO club. It is deeply ironic that he refused to understand why his students would want to watch the women undress instead of watch Jim deliver his economics lecture. Given that easy choice, I'd watch the dancers too.

With extra time on my hands one afternoon, I walked by David Garretson's class door and entered. David's scintillating presentation was an amazing jewel. His very nature was that of a riveting teacher,. David was a rare natural; he could have competed with dancers. There are few class presentations that good.

Property disposal sales offered entertaining bargains and odd disasters. Sometimes there wasn't time to check the merchandise before bidding. What could go wrong bidding \$25 for 100 lbs of paint? What I thought would be white house paint turned to be sewage colored. No wonder the Marines did not want it.

Barry Engel had a concrete house much like a bunker, so I gave him the odd epoxy paint for waterproofing. Along with that paint were a dozen cases of yellow spray paint. Barry's wanted his little jeep painted red but it became yellow. Aaron painted his stained toilet seat yellow before a guest came visiting. The seat was plastic that the paint softened so that a week later it still stuck to Aaron if he sat on it. He bought a new seat before his fiancée arrived.

Asians have the saying "Old cars go to American bases to die." With no stigma attached to our operating junk cars in Asia, we only had to patch them up now and then to keep them running. Barry had a Toyota which shuddered side to side alarmingly. On checking, I found that Okinawa's humidity had completely rusted through metal that stiffened its body. There was nothing resisting the car's body bending side to side in its middle. We saved the engine and tires from his car and bought a good body in the closest junkyard. The serial number, part of body steel no longer matched his registration. The numbers mismatch worried Barry, so he junked the car a year later.

Northern Japan was so safe that I left my Yamaha in front of a hotel with its engine idling twenty minutes. In Okinawa I chained my Kawasaki motorcycle to solid posts. A nice neighbor

living near my favorite post said the police wanted to ticket me for chaining the bike to a No Parking sign, but they could not locate me. I had forgotten the meaning of a round blue sign with a red border.

I solved that problem by riding to Naha, taking the ferry to Kyushu and riding the Kawasaki my next assignment, Iwakuni, where I sold it.

Enroute from Iwakuni to the Philippines for Christmas I developed a dull ache in my chest. As there was a ten-hour layover at Kadena, I went to the clinic to get checked. Their initial concern was a heart attack but it was only a very large gallstone.

The words "We will have it out this afternoon and you can be on your way tomorrow" did not ring true as I rode the ambulance to the hospital. Fortunately, they stopped near the mail room where I said "I'd like to check my mail". I escaped out the building's back door knowing that I was only uncomfortable and not in danger.

Waiting at the terminal late that evening, I had to stop the pain of that big gallstone. The solution was to stand on my head shifting my stone to a less irritating place. As our military is not understanding of odd behavior, I needed a place where I could stand on my head for a while without attracting unwanted attention. The terminal daycare room was empty so I stood on my head there 30 minutes and my pain was over. My wife and I made our 10:30 pm flight to the Philippines and all was well.

My gallstone was conveniently removed a few months later between spring and summer terms. A large cut, rivaling Lyndon Johnson's, left me so feeble that only after several days could I walk slowly. My decision for no surgery in December was a good one.

The lesson in this is that you must rely on yourself to make good decisions. An example of following bad advice took place years later in Korea. The ticket seller in the Seoul train station said, "If you hurry, you can make the train to Suwon, it is about to leave." I ran to and through the turnstile, holding my ticket out for punching, ran on to the stairs down to the first platform. Passengers were there so I asked "Suwon?" Reflexively they replied "yes" and I ran, following bad advice, into the train as the door shut.

Something was obviously wrong as there were only six other people on the train. "Suwon?" I plaintively asked. "No, we are putting the train away for the night." "Can you stop the train and let me off?" "No, but we will help you".

Familiar streets disappeared and ten minutes later we entered a vast rail switchyard. Another train was exiting the yard and my new friends exclaimed "There is your train!" They shouted the magic words "Stoppu!, Stoppu!" to the other train which, to my amazement, stopped. Their next advice was "Jump, run, catch the train." (more bad advice)

So I jumped off of my moving train and ran to the end of the last car of the other train which had begun moving again. As I reached for the hand hold, I saw it was impossible to catch,

tripped and knocked myself unconscious on the steel rail. A second after hitting the rail, I felt intensely sleepy and the train track felt so comfortable that I "slept".

The next thing I knew, my new friends had carried me, unconscious, into a nearby clinic. The physician asked how I felt, probed my newly swollen bump and said "You will be all right, just don't fall on the tracks again".

With a taxi ride I made the same train I'd missed and this time my ticket was finally punched. When I arrived at our Suwon base my condition was checked and as I had been unconscious, there was an ambulance ride for me back to the Youngsan hospital a few hundred feet from where I had begun my trip south that night. Larry said I did not have to teach my noon Osan class the next day, but being tough, I taught it. It did not hurt much but it looked like I had been beat up. My students were too polite to ask who beat me up. I faced the chalkboard so my damaged face would not distract my students. My nose was rebroken to straighten it a few months later

The tough Marine officers did not have heat when the Iwakuni BOQ became chilly in late October. I was cold and sought heat. The shower had abundant hot water so I ran hot water and blew the steamy warm air into my room with a fan. There were unanticipated results, my room became soggy, and I could tell that the building was out of hot water as live steam finally issued from the shower nozzle. The tough Marine officers had the choice of a cold shower or steam cleaning that evening. None complained and I did not mention my creativity in heating.

Iwakuni Air Station dates from WW2, the BOQ was built of eucalyptus imported by the occupying Australians. The British Empire has its unique camp followers, merchants from India who were still outside the base when I was there. Its hangers were old ones, rounded but with a point at the top. Near the BOQ was a concrete "zero hanger" It tempted me to ride my motorcycle up and over it but I chickened out, as up close, it suddenly looked very steep. These sturdy little concrete hangers can be found on many former Japanese airbases and are easily identified by an airplane shaped entrance.

At Iwakuni I learned to "surf" a bicycle Marine style. You ride leaning back, fold your arms and steer by leaning. The MP's did not like anyone doing it but then neither did they like my riding a Honda while pulling a moped alongside with one hand. The moped was for my wife and she rode well, so with her new learner's permit in hand she and I rode motorbikes out into the unpopulated mountainous areas north of Iwakuni. On one ride a police car began following her, but gave up the chase when it high centered leaving a bridge. The little Honda continued all afternoon on the mountain roads but the patient police stopped us on our way back to Iwakuni. We had the proper identity and permits so the police caused us no trouble but suggested that she ride only on the base. Connie was the winner of a car chase.

Near the Iwakuni gate was the Japanese-American friendship office. It was run by Mr Okuza who served on one of the Pacific islands that our military bypassed. The islanders were getting quite hungry and asked for help from Tokyo. Help arrived, not the expected submarine with

food but as a radio message telling how to remove the explosive from unexploded torpedos on the beach. The explosive was to be used to kill fish. They found that the American explosive was not sensitive and although powerful, exploded slower than the Japanese product which required much less impact for it to explode. The removal process involved pushing a heavy steel rod into the torpedo through a hole, if the explosive detonated the rod would shoot out the hole. He said they were careful and the torpedoes did not kill many of the explosive salvagers. Mr Okuza returned to Japan at war's end, and being a translator, he volunteered to work with the Americans as he was suspicious about what they were like. He was pleased to find that they were generous, good-hearted people who he liked.

Near Iwakuni, I met another veteran of that war, a Kamakazi pilot. He said that it was obviously not a good idea. He was the right age so I accepted what he said and did not ask how he escaped his fate. It was believable as a decade earlier the nice physics teacher across the hall was a former Lufwaffe Me109 pilot.

The ruins at Hiroshima, off limits to insensitive Marines in August, are deeply sobering and were in my mind as I fled to the USA from a potential nuclear strike on Osan Air Base in 1993. The Air Force put intercepting missiles a few miles north at Suwon soon after I departed.

After being away from the USA seventeen years there was culture shock and strange new mysteries to learn about. One was a big hard lump in the battery box of my car that on close inspection was a mummified possum. I could not explain the function of lighted towers beside interstate freeways (they were cell phone towers). Satellite dishes were now tiny toys compared to the older big manly dishes which could probably reach the moon. People sent typed messages over phone lines on fax machines. Drivers drove predictably without changing the driving rules as they drove.

Even Japanese bus drivers could be wild. As I sat at the back of the bus the driver braked hard and my large glass bottle of Pepsi slid down the entire aisle like a torpedo, homing in on the driver's ticket machine where it exploded.

I went clam digging in Oregon and two other diggers saw my Korean wife, short hair, flight crew eyeglasses, and war surplus green shirt with its unit patch. It was impossible to convince them that I was anything but someone from a secret program. They insisted on digging clams for me.

Being back in the USA took some adjusting as I had become Asian, Asia was home to me. Twenty-seven years away from Maryland, when I dream, it is often that I'm still in Asia.