

UMUC for Two

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What seems like many years ago, but was “only” 1998, Faith and Bob met at the orientation program in Tokyo. Faith was arriving from her previous stint in the European Division where she put in 3 years teaching Accounting with occasional side trips into Mathematics and Business courses. She had gotten into UMUC from her previous position at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. This was in 1995 and was to be a one-year, change of pace while a new Dean reorganized the Department of Business and Economics. After two years of leave, Faith had to decide to return or relinquish her position. Even before meeting me, she decided she loved UMUC more than UMES. Typically, in the European Division she taught in various locations on the continent (plus two term experiences in Keflavik, Iceland, Cambridge, England, and Naples, Italy and from there she was also assigned a course at Sicily. Later she had the experience of being assigned to Incirlik, Turkey where the instruction staff was “invited” to visit the island of Cyprus once a term for political reasons.

Meanwhile Bob wanted to spend some time overseas and remembered an article in the Washington Star (now defunct) from his high school days (1949?) about the University of Maryland setting up a teaching program for soldiers still stationed in Europe. After calling the University to see whether such a program still existed, he interviewed with Rosemary Hoffmann in College Park, Maryland in December 1997. At first, they wanted him to go to Korea in January to fill a vacancy, but that was too soon to make Stateside arrangements. But later he took an early posting at Osan, South Korea (June 1998) where he taught Psychology – his first teaching experience with UMUC. Even that was a bit exciting because North Korea launched a missile into the East China Sea resulting in what sounded like the entire USAF taking off in the middle of an 0800 class as well as a two-day lockdown on base.

In Korea UMUC provided the apartments to instructors because the “key deposit” was exorbitant compared to our salaries. An interesting early cultural introduction was when I discovered space under the floorboards in the apartment which in the older days had provided for heating. Apparently prior to UMUC taking the apartments the beds could also be heated at night by a clever similar system. Another bit of cultural education came when we had to climb over a hill to get to one of the gates at USAF Osan and one passed a number of local dwellings, many of which had several dogs chained outside. Toward the end of the month the number of dogs gradually dwindled to zero. It took some knowledge of the Korean culinary tastes to understand why the change. In addition, we were quickly introduced to the Korean national

dish called kimchi. In fact at the local markets one could get up to 25 different versions of kimchi.

Both of us were assigned to South Korea for another two terms where we got to know each other much better as we found interesting parts of South Korea to explore. But first Bob was assigned to Daegu (September 1998) while Faith was introduced to other wonders of Osan and the rest of South Korea. Since one of Bob's courses at Osan had been canceled, in Daegu he taught three courses by traveling between three bases. First there was an inter-camp bus from Fort Henry in Daegu, to teach a class at Camp Carroll, then there was a walk into town to catch a train to Pusan (at the south end of South Korea) for an evening class twice a week, and then a train arriving back in Daegu about midnight. Once in Pusan one had to wander through the back alleys to the base. Along the way anything from pirated tapes to household goods to wonderful-smelling restaurants to time with friendly-looking ladies was for sale. Transportation and finding directions were greatly aided by the help of the field representatives both there and in Daegu. The UMUC apartment in Daegu was one of the most interesting I would find in my time with Maryland. It was a spacious basement apartment, but at some time the home of the landlady upstairs was re-designed with a sunken living room. As a result some of the ceilings of the apartment were exactly at head height. But the most interesting change was in the bathroom which had three levels to it. One entered and was greeted by a wall with 3 steps up to the washbasin level. The toilet level was up another 3 steps, and to use the toilet one had to either sit sideways or dangle one's legs over the wall. The shower was also at the top level where there was room only to either squat or dangle one's legs to use the hand shower. An interesting arrangement, but I was glad to hear that I would be transferred back to Osan after one term.

Meanwhile Faith worked out of Osan (September to December 1998) and various bases North of there. Typical for Faith in addition to teaching she took the opportunity to travel everywhere from the DMZ to Jeju-do (an island off the South coast) and took a course in Korean hand acupuncture from a school in Seoul (with Bob as her practice subject). Our courses were pretty standard, consisting of an introductory course plus one other in our specialty – Accounting for Faith and Psychology for Bob. The students were routinely attentive and ready with assignments – “Yes Sir, when is it due? How many pages? Which format?” They did everything but salute us. So this was not demanding teaching. Quite a few of the instructors were on permanent or semi-permanent assignments and living locally, often with a family. So, they were a good source of information of all kinds, not only about the South Korean culture but about getting around the area. The most problematic aspect of the base was the primitive internet to reach the States. At 80 bytes (that is “bytes”, not “giga-bytes”) it was extraordinarily slow and not always reliable. But this was, after all, in the early days of internet communication. Pyeongtaek, the city adjoining Osan base, was a small city, but one with good restaurants and

many shops catering to the U. S. military. It also had good bus transportation both North and South. In Seoul (40 km away) one could get trains to most significant cities and connect to the Seoul commercial airport for traveling.

Following South Korea, we were both transferred to Okinawa, Japan (January 1999 to June 2000) where we lived in adjacent apartments and solidified our relationship by traveling together throughout Okinawa-Jima, the Ryuku Islands, China and Southeast Asia at every opportunity (three times to China for us). From there Faith also went on two Habitat for Humanity builds, one in the Philippines with Jimmy Carter and one on Fiji with the native peoples. While on Okinawa we got to know and spend a lot of time with Peter Wodarz, an English teacher and his lovely wife, Rye -san as well as many of their instructor friends. Teaching involved a variety of courses in addition to the usual Introductory courses, and on almost all the bases on Okinawa. Bob had the opportunity to take on some graduate counseling courses which included not only military family members but a few local Okinawan students. This resulted in visiting practicum placements for the local students, and sitting in on counseling sessions, some conducted in Ho'ogen (the central Okinawan dialect). Interesting!

One of the things which was quite helpful was that cars were readily available on the bases and quite inexpensive. They also had a junked car lot so that parts for most of the aging cars were available. What was not so helpful was that the Japanese drive on the left side of the road and have the gear shift on the left. This takes some getting used to. Interestingly when we left we sold our van to 3 marines, none of whom had ever used a stick shift nor driven on the left. I spent an hour trying to teach one of them to master these intricacies. I insisted that we do this on one of the base parking lots rather than on busy local roads. He was sure that he could handle it after that. I was not so sure, but hopeful.

Everywhere we went, from tenting on Okinawan beaches to traveling in Tokyo, Fujisan, the beautiful central valley area, and Kyoto, we found that the Japanese are very honest, friendly and helpful, especially when we got lost, even when we did not have a common language. We traveled almost all of Okinawa Island and to many of the castle ruins (most from the 14th to 17th centuries) and loved getting to know its cultural festivals and cuisine. One of its most memorable areas is the Memorial Peace Park. There we found memorial markers listing all the identified soldiers and sailors of all nations who died during the vicious WWII battles for Okinawa Island. There are an appalling number of names listed on row after row after row of markers by nation and military group – over 240,000 are listed. In addition, each Prefecture of Japan has a large and artistic memorial for peace on the hillside above them.

On a less somber note, we took every opportunity to snorkel many of the nearby beaches and reefs and visit the islands off the coast. While we were there our youngest adult son also came to visit, met a local woman, and eventually married her, adding an interesting additional

connection to the Island. They now live in Denver, Colorado along with our four grandchildren, but we still take any opportunity we can to visit the island and enjoy its wonders.

After 18 months in Okinawa, we decided to transfer back to Europe where we had the common experience of being initially based at Ramstein and Kaiserslautern (September to December 2000) and, from there, traveling to many of the bases in central Germany for our teaching of a variety of courses in our primary subjects. This involved a lot of driving or public transportation, depending on how far it was to the assigned base. The public transportation put us more often into contact with the local cultures and foods. At one point we ended up renting an apartment on a Weingut in Bissersheim at the North end of the Weinstrasse and for many years kept in touch with the Siegel-Heilmann family who ran it. When we left for Italy, our little car was loaded with cases of excellent German wine. Imagine taking wine to Italy!

In addition, Faith had made many friends during her first assignment in the European Division, so we enjoyed traveling to see them and visit their local areas. Visiting with people such as Elizabeth Kraus in Nurnberg, Carl and Zora Gaymon in Nandietschweiler (north of Ramstein), Dorothee Alberty in Kempen, Ed Deaton in Rota, Spain, Carol Dolan and Trevor Sloan in various places near Ramstein etc., took us from one corner of Europe to the other and beyond. Heidelberg was the administrative center, of course, and we spent quite a bit of time going to and from there for meetings and visits with our senior subject and area administrators. Jane McCann, the director of the Psychology program and Robert Scott, who managed the varied Business programs, were always ready to sit and chat about problems and prospects in our specialties. In addition, working with the charming and knowledgeable librarians, to seek out information, books and instructional aids was always delightful and productive. Monika Zwink, who was our area representative when we were in Italy was always wonderful and most helpful when we were transferred. We are still in touch because she now lives in Phoenix.

We were transferred to Aviano, Italy (September 2001 to June 2004). Here we lived in the small town of Colle di Arba (320 residents) 30 kilometers from the base where no one spoke English and we were enticed, often over a bottle of wine, into learning Italian. We fell in love with the town and its residents and later tried to arrange to live there permanently. But that didn't work out because of too many bureaucratic complications and pitfalls. We still go back for prolonged visits whenever possible.

Meanwhile we had an interlude in Keflavik, Iceland (January to May 2002, Faith's second) where we taught an interesting variety of students in our primary subject areas. Besides fighting the wind walking to and from our classrooms we had to work at keeping the sun at bay while sleeping during the latter part of our stay. The dormitory had a lively Happy Hour several days a week which helped with the difficult winter times. We also took advantage of the base's many tours as well as traveling to every part of Iceland and all the waterfalls and glaciers we

could reach. This included circling the island by car with Peter Wodarz our friend and fellow instructor visiting from Okinawa, as part of our education about Iceland's fascinating geology. Of course our stay included many visits to both Reykjavik and the famous Blue Lagoon. If you did not get out and exploring (which an appalling number of the troops assigned there did not) it could be a rather grim time, given the low number of daylight hours and the unappealing weather.

While stationed in Italy besides teaching on Aviano air base, Bob occasionally taught at Vicenza, Northern Italy's major Army base in the evening, and also at Naples, Italy Naval station for weekend classes to which we traveled via Silver Italia Rail passes courtesy of UMUC and Monika Zwink, our beloved area representative on the Heidelberg staff. Because we, and Faith earlier, behaved ourselves reasonably well (or at least did not get into serious trouble) in Iceland and other assignments, we prevailed on Monika to base us in Aviano between assignments to Germany and elsewhere. Throughout these travels to our assigned teaching bases, we were again impressed with how much more advanced the public transportation systems in Europe were as compared to the States. We traveled them all at one time or another: the complex and interconnected railroad systems, local and inter-country bus routes, trams and trolleys as well as the very convenient subways or metros.

Courtesy of our German friend Dorothee Alberty we were introduced to and joined Happimag, a vacation program where you sign up for a week's stay at an apartment at some resort (ranging from Bad Gastein in the Austrian alps to Cannes on the French Riviera to Marbella on the Costa del Sol to the island of Mallorca to name but a few). Having the opportunity to travel and using the voluminous knowledge of Maryland's base representatives and fellow instructors about local sites and transportation has made our teaching experiences with UMUC one of the highlights of our lives.

Faith & Bob