

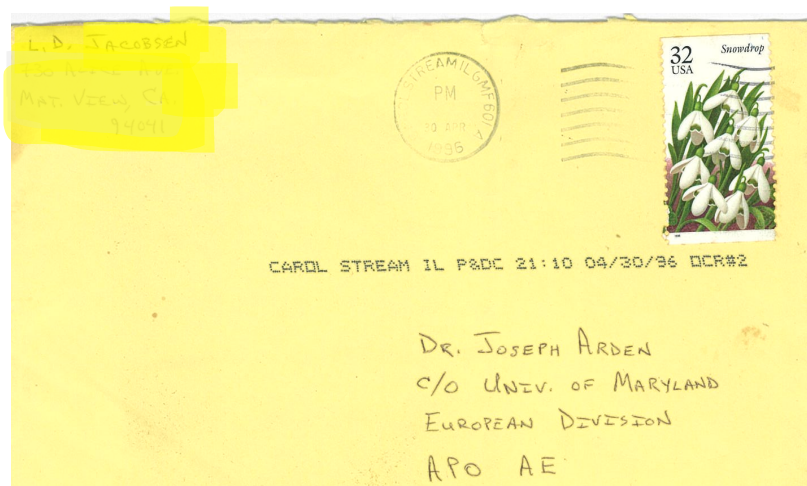
Generally, One Never Knows

Joe Arden
September 2024

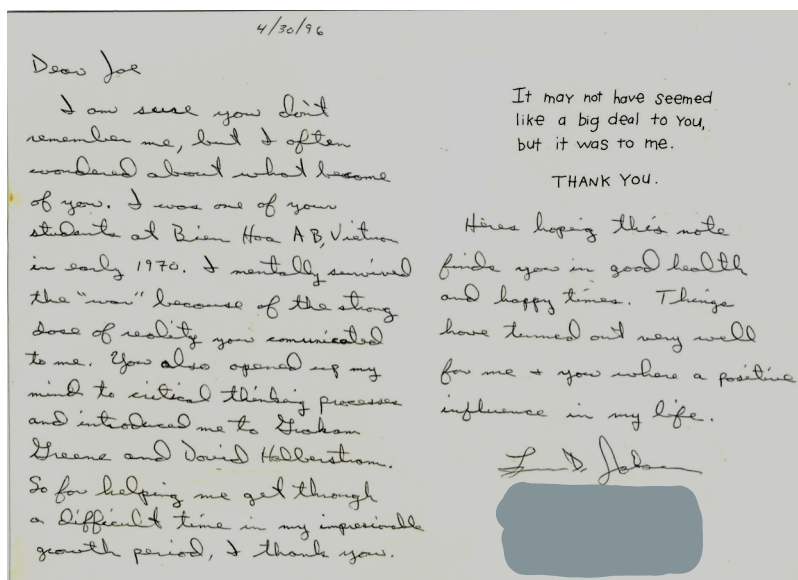
As a teacher, one seldom---really quite rarely---ever knows with any certainty whether one's teaching efforts did have an impact, did positively affect, did make any tangible difference in the being/the consciousness/the life of one's students. Even one student.

Of my 40 years with the Maryland Overseas Program, 36 were spent as an administrator, including 32 as Director of either the Asian or the European program. From 1967-1971, however, I taught with Maryland: Osan/Humphreys/Yongsan/Daegu/Tokyo/Misawa/Bangkok/U-Tapao/Karamursel/Naples/Ramstein/Bitburg/Spangdahlem---and several installations in Viet-Nam. But by 1996, the memory of those marvelous years was not with me on a day-to-day basis.

Then one day in early May 1996 an envelope landed on my desk in Heidelberg, Germany.



"Personal & Confidential" had been handwritten on the reverse side. Inside was a card dated 4/30/96 and titled, "It may not have seemed like a big deal to you, but it was to me. Thank you."



Dear Joe

I am sure you don't remember me, but I often wondered about what became of you. I was one of your students at Bien Hoa AB, Vietnam in early 1970. I mentally survived the "war" because of the strong dose of reality you communicated to me. You also opened up my mind to critical thinking processes and introduced me to Graham Greene and David Halberstam. So for helping me get through a difficult time in my impressionable growth period, I thank you.

Here's hoping this note finds you in good health and happy times. Things have turned out very well for me and you were a positive influence in my life."

At the bottom of the card was a signature of someone I could not place, "Lynn D. Jacobson," and an address in California.

I remembered well Bien Hoa, but could not recall with certainty which classes I had taught there. More than 25 years had elapsed. Brushing away cobwebs and checking some personal records, I found that in Term III of Academic Year 1969-70 (Jan-March 1970) when assigned to Bien Hoa, one of my courses was "*HIST 128, Diplomatic History of the United States in 20th Century.*" Taking advantage of my 1996 administrative role, I was able to access Lynn Jacobson's transcript. And yes, he had been a student in my HIST 128 so very long ago, where he earned the grade of "C."

Naturally enough, I contacted Lynn Jacobsen and learned that after being discharged from the Air Force, he continued his education on the G.I. Bill. Subsequently, he had a highly successful career with the *3Com Corporation* in California.

A couple of years later, *The Achiever* (then as now, UMUC/UMGC's primary outreach publication) carried an article featuring Lynn Jacobsen. Lynn explained that he had been able to contact me through a story that mentioned my name in the *San Jose Mercury News* about UMUC teaching in Bosnia.

SNAPSHOT OF UMUC

UMUC IN VIETNAM:

Lynn Jacobsen's Education for a Lifetime

When I got to Vietnam in October of '69, the government had been saying, "Don't worry about it—we'll be home by Christmas." That was the official position, and though they'd been repeating the same thing for some time, there were many of us who still believed it.

I wasn't home for Christmas that year, but I was home for the next one. I spent 12 months at the Bien Hoa Air Base, learning there were lots of things we had been led to believe that weren't necessarily the whole truth. I think that's one reason why the mental scars of so many of my fellow veterans have never fully healed.

As an impressionable 25-year-old, I, too, could have emerged from the experience with a lot of bitterness. But a bright young professor came into my world for a few months and added new dimensions to it. That professor was Joseph Arden from UMUC. I didn't have enough credits to enroll in his upper-level political science course, but fortunately for me, he let me into the class anyway.

As a former intelligence officer in Vietnam, Joe knew we weren't getting out of there in a few months, and that was a strange thing to hear from a figure of some authority. The situation was more complex than originally anticipated, he said. To support his theories, Joe assigned readings that had immediate relevance to our own circumstances, in addition to basic works about the history of U.S. expansion and foreign policy. The most enlight-



Lynn Jacobsen (center), shown with friends Martha Searls (left) and Mary Finegan, read an article about UMUC in Bosnia last year that prompted him to get in touch with the "bright young professor" who taught him in Vietnam more than 20 years ago.

ening writings were *The Americanization of Vietnam* by David Halberstam and *The Quiet American* by Graham Greene.

So many Americans in Vietnam had very biased views. They saw and heard only one side, and they believed it. They believed we could just "mop up" the communists and be done with it, without really knowing what the war was all about or recognizing the nationalism that was churning along with it.

But Joe Arden and his reading assignments saved me—and some of my friends I lent the materials to—from that train of thought. Through the writings of Halberstam and Greene, we saw the bigger picture of how the rest of the world viewed Vietnam then and in centuries past. We learned that Ho Chi Minh had actually once been our ally. We swallowed a strong dose of reality that helped us understand why

things were happening—without passing judgment.

That class came into my life at a critical moment. While many of my fellow veterans became harshly disillusioned by the war, my friends and I were able to see things from a broader perspective. We had the benefit of explanation. Greene's novel helped us grasp the psyche of the Vietnamese people, and that was very important. You can't imagine the strong connection you feel when you realize what they've had to tolerate.

At the air base, we worked every day for 12 hours, sometimes longer. But I gave up sleep to get my homework done for Joe's twice-weekly class. It was only a two-month course, but it was so important to me that, when I look back on it, it seems as if it lasted a whole year.

I was reading the *San Jose Mercury News* one day last year

when I saw an Associated Press article about UMUC in Bosnia. Joe Arden was quoted somewhere in the story as the head of the school's European Division, and I thought, "Oh my god, he survived!" I sent him the clipping along with a letter thanking him for the influence he had on my life. I've always had a soft spot in my heart for those UMUC professors in Vietnam. It was a war zone where people were getting killed every day, and there these people were, trying to educate us. It's wonderful that the U.S. government cared that much, that UMUC cared that much, and that the professors cared that much. It showed me there were people with compassion on all sides. As for Joe, I'm just happy he's alive and doing what he loves.

Editor's Note: Lynn Jacobsen came home from Vietnam in October 1970. When he retired from the Air Force 12 years later, he went back to school under the GI Bill while working as a technical recruiter for different companies. Eventually, he landed a job at 3Com Corporation when it was still a tiny organization housed near a dump in Mountain View, California. By the time he left the company and the workforce in 1994, 3Com was generating billions of dollars in sales each year.

Joe Arden, who joined UMUC in 1967, went on to become vice president and director of UMUC's European Division. He's now back in Asia as head of the University's Asian Division.

Obviously, in May 1996, I felt very good to receive and read Lynn Jacobsen's card. Even now, with another almost 30 years having gone by, I still feel very good.

I was lucky because generally teachers don't know where their students' lives take them. But I suspect—and would certainly like to so think---that almost all teaching veterans of Maryland's Overseas Programs probably had at least one Lynn Jacobsen as a student.