

Catching on: In Which I Attempt to Explain How I Got into This!

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April, 1993

We were living in the DC area, Silver Spring, Maryland to be exact last stop on the Red Line metro. For four years I had been in what I called my "Second Grad School"- researching and writing at the Library of Congress and the Folger Shakespeare Library, writing and publishing the articles that were supposed to eventually get me that tenure track job somewhere, plodding along on the book that was supposed to do the same. It was the perfect place for it- plenty of talks, academic conferences, etc, and plenty of occasional adjunct teaching at George Washington, Trinity College and a regular diet of adjunct classes at Marymount of Virginia in Arlington, I was "the professor of the Red Line", often seen grading papers on the metro as I shuttled from one university to another, or to research on the hill. So all was well- I could ride that metro line to all of these, publish, get seen in the right places and burnish my teaching resume all at once- the perfect base to launch my campaign for a tenure track position somewhere, once the Army decided where they were sending my wife after her internship at Walter Reed.

In April we got the final word- Wurzburg, Germany. Well, the tenure track campaign would have to go on hold, but the prospect of living in Europe for several years was not a bad consolation prize for a man building a career in European history! But I would need to keep teaching somehow, and my mind immediately turned to "The University of Maryland" program in Europe. My cousin Susan Schultz had taught there for a number of years while she was working on her dissertation in German history, so why not me?

Since I lived in Silver spring, I duly drove over to College Park with a resume in hand, somehow found the office of the University of Maryland University College Campus and asked about the possibilities of teaching. One of the lovely ladies running the office there (and I am truly sorry ladies, I can't remember who it was), told me the best thing to do was mail that resume to Heidelberg and let them know when I actually arrived in Germany. I was given an APO address (my first exposure to what we be a constant feature of life) popped my resume in the post, and waited.

August, 1993

We had arrived in Germany in the second week of July. I had immediately notified headquarters at Heidelberg as instructed, and got a response that sort of sounded like "Oh really? We'll call you if we want you". Spirits sagged. By the first week of August, all the excitement of moving and setting up the new apartment was over, and I was resigned to the reality that I was not going to be teaching that fall and wondering what to do. I signed up for the basic German class with "Maryland", but at a barbeque one weekend met an oh- so- knowing woman with an MA in Education who informed me "Maryland never hires anybody". Spirits sagged further. The next day, however, a Monday, the phone rang. The caller introduced himself as John Floyd, the Area Director for North Central Germany. He said he was going to be in Wurzburg on Friday, and asked if I could meet him at the education center there. YES SIR, please!

The meeting went well. John was friendly, collegial even, and after about a half hour of friendly chit chat about the operations in Germany and feeling me out about my intentions, he got down to cases. "I see your PhD is in European History, but you have done some stuff in American history

right?" I said "yes," and mentioned my work at Vicksburg, my work on the Southeast Louisiana culture resources project for the Corps of Engineers and my colonial Virginia summer project with the NEH. "But you've never taught an American history survey, right?" I had to confess- "No"- heart sinking. "Do you think you COULD do an American History to 1865 survey?" I decided to fake confidence- "If I was given a textbook and a little advance time so I can stay ahead of the students, sure." John Floyd smiled- a smile that I later learned was the "I've found my guy" smile- reached in his briefcase and handed me the textbook! "You start Monday evening at Schweinfurt. Oh, and by the way, we can ROF your German class since you are teaching this term." That weekend was busy, writing lectures as fast as I could, but we took time out for another barbeque. Same oh- so -knowing woman, same "Maryland never hires anybody" line, but his time I just said "I start Monday evening at Schweinfurt" and walked away.

The first term was great. I had no idea what kind of students to expect, but was pleased to find they were no worse than my students had been a year before at Marymount of Virginia. In fact, they were better in some ways- at Marymount they were spoiled teenagers. These guys (and it was, by chance, an all male class- I later learned this was what was known as a unit class) were a little older, and mostly more mature. Though perhaps a little lacking in academic background, but they were more willing to work, and didn't seem to have the entitlement syndrome I'd seen at private institutions in the states. About mid-term, a random happenstance really bonded us though. I went to see Steppenwolf (yes, this was 1993, and yes, those old boys were still touring) play at a little German winery, only to discover about half my class there as well! They were as surprised to see me as I was them, but in the weeks that followed it was clear they had decided I was OK.

So it began, and in the next few terms the classes kept coming, one each term, but they kept getting farther and farther away. I came to realize that I was being used for the stuff my new friend Bruce Hull (who had kindly driven me down to Heidelberg for my first faculty meeting) and Charlie Newkirk (whom I had not yet met, but seemed to be an institutional legend in the region) didn't want. Charlie and Bruce had the Wurzburg area staked out for a long time, so I was getting the leftovers, and the drives were getting longer and longer.

Fall term two I was in Kirsch Goehns- "the Rock" my students called it. Another unit class, and I was amazed at their cohesion. Everybody was making almost exactly the same grade! They weren't cheating, but they were studying together all the time, with the strong pulling the weaker ones along. When I finally commented that this was great, but the thing they really needed to improve on was making the next step and telling me what they **thought** about the topic of an essay (give their own opinion instead of a group prepared essay), a young PFC promptly responded- "You want us to think? But sir, this is the Army, they don't train us to think!". "Time to focus more on critical thinking" I thought to myself. Spring term one was at some small munitions depot south of Frankfurt, where our classroom was a bowling alley! More spares than strikes in that class, and my moral started to drop.

By late spring I was getting tired of driving, and when John called and asked if I wanted to teach at Munster Depot, I quickly consulted a map and discovered it was clear on the other side of Kaiserslautern- practically France! For the first time I demurred, explaining to John the drive would cost me more than I would make, even with fuel coupons! But I then mentioned that things weren't working out too well in my home life, and I would be willing to move, temporarily, just about anywhere, if one of those full-time traveling positions became available. "We usually hire those guys from the States" John replied "but I'll keep it in mind if something comes up."

July 1994

I had been out of teaching since March, and figured turning down the really long drive had finished my brief career with "Maryland" (I still hadn't figured out the difference between that and UMUC). I was pretty down in the dumps, as my marriage was coming apart, and I felt like a stranger in my own apartment. Then, in the first week of July, the phone rang, and it was John Floyd! "Are you still interested in a traveling position?" "More than ever." I replied. "Anything to get me out of here!" "Alright then, this is the direct phone number to Dr Arden's office. Call it tonight... after midnight." "After Midnight?" I thought "What is this, some kind of secret operation or something?"

Well I made the call, and sure enough, Dr Arden answered, but the conversation started kind of vague- they could possibly use me "somewhere in the Mediterranean". A half hour into the conversation, I was going "somewhere in Italy". A half hour after that, I was going to Sigonella, Sicily. I would be teaching HIST 156, 336 and two weekend seminars, one on D-Day and another on WW II in the Mediterranean- a topic which I had just suggested myself! (That's right, we created that class in the course of one phone call-and it's still on the books today!) I would be working with a field representative there named Lou D'Angelo and the ESO, Susan Wheless, was friendly to UMUC. And oh yes, on my way south, I should swing by Heidelberg and pick up the text books for these classes from Greg Emerson- since I was driving it anyway, I might as well take the books with me!

And that is how I started with UMUC. Little did I know this was what life would be like for the next quarter century.