

Johnnie Aldrich, May 27, 2020

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June, 1977. My travel companion and colleague Mary Clawson and I sat in the Reception Office at Kenitra Naval Station, Morocco, while a young uniformed clerk typed up our ID cards. Another uniformed fellow occupied the 4th chair in the tiny office, talking excitedly into the phone: "Guess what? A Maryland prof has arrived to teach that lit course.... Yeah, I'm lookin' at 'her. She's good looking and probably will go easy on us." He winked at me. I rolled my eyes, nodded, and smiled. "Class will start on Tuesday," he continued, "if we can get a few more people. Can you get over to the office to register now?"

That uniformed caller was Wade Masood, who so desperately wanted on-base courses that he took on the UMED Registrar's recruiting and lecturer orientation duties for the next few days. (Weeks, actually.)

Mary and I listened hopefully to the calls. We'd arrived from Spain, where I'd recently finished my doctoral work at the Universidad de Salamanca. When I had called Heidelberg, weeks before, about a Term V assignment, anywhere, the message was clear: "Term V registrations are usually light. The Kenitra, Morocco, center wants an upper-level literature class, but that base is slated to close in August of next year. The registrar is not hopeful that there'll be enough students for a Term V class. You can drive down if you want to, but if there are insufficient students, it will just be a nice celebratory trip at your expense." Mary agreed to pay. I agreed to go.

We spent much of that first weekend "partying/recruiting" — at the NCO Club, at the O Club, at the swimming pool, anywhere a crowd was gathered and civilian ID holders were allowed. By 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, only 8 students had registered. And the autovon was down. Would Heidelberg admin allow the class to go? (At this point, I cannot remember with certainty which Mediterranean director was on duty; perhaps the Rosemary Scholl / Walter Knoche team?) Wade persuaded me to begin anyway. "It's better to act and then apologize if necessary," he said. So that first class met at the usual 6:00 p.m. When the autovon was operative again 2 days later, a lovely voice from Heidelberg said "continue."

Long story shortened: Mary and I remained at Kenitra for a full 9 months. By the time we left to drive to the next assignment in Adana, Turkey, I was teaching 3 courses. Mary came out of retirement and was teaching 2. A new dynamite registrar with an M.A. in math was teaching 1. Thanks to the continued efforts of Wade and Registrar Nancy Touil (a Nebraskan married to a Moroccan officer), students signed into UMED classes until the base closed in August, 1978.

## Two Memorable Details From Those Months in Morocco

Term I, 1977, perhaps my strangest assignment ever. The commander of a small naval communications installation about 30 miles from the main Kenitra location had requested an ENGL 101 course to be taught in the evenings on his site. He guaranteed that there would be 15-20 students. This captain was trying to complete a Master's degree from a Louisiana university and had been denied because of deficient writing skills. At the time, because Mary's Fiat had "lost" its automatic transmission (another story), I was driving a base "loaner," a battered Chevy 9-passenger van, the largest vehicle I'd ever driven. I always slowed down for every rare curve in the usually straight desert road out to this site, fearful that the rear end would not follow without fishtailing!

The dark of the desert night between sites was palpable. If there were any dwellings once I turned off the main highway, the occupants were early to bed. I suppose that the star show on those mostly clear nights must have been an unbelievable spectacle, but I was too focused on anticipation of class (and, regrettably, in those days not really interested in cosmic displays) to notice.

Our first class was typical: The captain sat at the back of the Quonset hut classroom. He was like the 15+ students who sat in rows between me and the captain: not one of them said one word unless I directed a question or asked for a comment specifically, from him. Rarely did anyone ask a question. In group-work sessions, the captain always was in charge of his 4 or 5; never mind my hints that he do otherwise.

My greatest regret now was that throughout that term, I never requested help from Mary about this strange (to me) group dynamic. She'd have known what to do. Never in all of the 15 years with UMED have I been so happy to see a class end.

Term II, 1977. Furthermore, I wish that the following encounter had happened before the previous one.

After the 2nd meeting of what must have been another literature course, a student, one of the young officers in the group, asked for a private interview, a lunch-time meeting at the O Club. Newly promoted to his rank, he told me that he was seriously considering dropping the class because the other students, most of whom were enlisted men, and I, addressed him by his first name rather than by his rank and last name.

On one of the unused napkins at our table, I drew 2 concentric circles. (I've often wondered how this idea came to me.) On one large portion of the circle on the left, I wrote "civilian"; on the other, "military." On the small middle portion, I wrote "UMED." As I drew, I explained.

"So, Jimmy, these are our worlds. You live and work in the military world, where you are addressed by your rank. I live and work in the civilian world, where I would be addressed as "Dr." in most formal circumstances. However, 2 nights a week, for 3 hours, we meet in this small middle world, the academic world sponsored in this case by the University of Maryland European Division. Think of this one as a Third World, where the norms and expectations are different from those of our usual worlds. I am 'Johnnie' in this classroom world; you are 'Jimmy.' This is, for now, an important reality in our lives."

He shrugged and nodded. And did not withdraw from the course.

ADDENDUM: Other stories from this assignment involve Wade Masood, Super Student, and Nancy Touil, Registrar *Extraordinaire*. I've lost touch with both. I know that Wade was one of the few students in the history of the overseas program to complete a B.S. degree in 3 years. He did that, in part, by registering for courses at the Rota Naval Base in Spain, buying the texts, meeting the lecturer, and taking military flights back to Rota for the final exam. He made several such trips during the months that we were in Morocco. Mary and I spent many social hours with Wade and his wife, Robin. I shall forever be grateful to him, not only for getting us started in Kenitra, but also for introducing me to Willie Nelson, of whom I'd never heard. We fantasized once about developing a course (at least a weekend mini-course) in the Poetry of Outlaw Willie. Now, I know only that he and Robin divorced after his return to the U.S.

About Nancy, I know only that she remained in Morocco until her pilot husband, who'd been falsely implicated in a coup attempt against the king of Morocco, was released from jail several years after Mary and I left Morocco. They and their son, who was, I think, about 8 years old in 1977, were living in Nebraska when I last heard from her.