

# MEMORIES OF THIRTY UM YEARS

by Josh Pachter

In 1979, I was married to a Dutch woman and teaching communication studies at what was then Slippery Rock State College in — where else? — Slippery Rock, PA.

My wife was on a leave of absence from medical school and eager to resume her studies, so we moved to Amsterdam, where I was fortunate to find a job as an editor at a company that published medical textbooks in English. What I really *wanted* to be doing, though, was teaching — and one day I spotted a recruitment ad for the University of Maryland European Division in the classified section of the *International Herald Tribune*. I put my resume and a cover letter in an envelope and sent it off to Heidelberg ... and nothing happened for about six months.

Then, one Thursday early in 1980, I got a phone called from Wally Knoche, asking me if I could come to Im Bosseldorn for an interview *the next day*. I set my alarm clock for Oh Dark Thirty and on Friday morning drove the six hours to Heidelberg. After an hour's pleasant conversation, Wally offered me two courses on a small Army base just across the Dutch border in Germany ... beginning on Monday, three days away!

I called my wife and discussed the offer with her, and she encouraged me to take it. So for the next eight weeks — Term IV, 1980 — I drove to Germany early Monday mornings, spent Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday nights in a pleasant *gasthaus*, taught my two sections of SPCH 100 — a nooner Mondays through Thursdays and a Monday/Wednesday evening class — and drove back to Amsterdam on Thursday afternoons. My Fridays were spent at the publishing company, which was gracious

enough to allow me to continue working for them; every Friday, I would drop off a week's completed material and pick up a new package of documents to be edited, and I did the actual editing between classes in Germany.

One weekend, I found a map showing the extent of Maryland's network of European locations and wondered if it might be possible to get an assignment in Greece for the summer. I decided to call Heidelberg HQ to ask, and, when I walked into the Ed Center on Monday to make the WATTS-line call, I found a note in my mailbox: "Call Heidelberg." I called ... and it turned out the Med Office was wondering if by any chance I might be willing to teach at Glyfada, outside Athens, for the summer!

That was the beginning of my career with the University of Maryland. In 1981, I spent twelve weeks — Term V plus a four-week "minimester" — in England. In '82, I was on Crete for Term IV and in Rota, Spain, for Term V, and then became the third Marylander to teach in Bahrain, where I wound up spending almost a year and began writing what would become a series of short crime stories featuring Mahboob Chaudri, a Pakistani native who worked as a police officer for the island emirate's Public Defense Force. (The stories were later collected as *The Tree of Life*, published by Wildside Press and available on Amazon.)

In 1983, my wife and I divorced. I moved to Erlangen in what was then still West Germany and began teaching for Maryland on bases in and around Bavaria. In 1990, I spent Term I in Berlin and was there for the last eight weeks of West Germany's existence. One of my students was in the Honor Guard the day President Reagan officially turned Checkpoint Charlie over to the German government, and he was allowed to invite a guest to the ceremony; he picked me, and I got to witness that moving

occasion up close. The night of Unification, I was at the Brandenburg Gate, celebrating with several million happy people, and the next day I left for England on a leave of absence to teach one semester at the American College in London.

While I was there, the first Gulf War broke out, and Joe Arden called me and suggested that, if it was possible to stay with ACL for an additional semester, that would probably be a good idea, given all the troops being sent from Europe to the Gulf. I *was* able to wangle another term in London, and after that — in May of 1991 — I moved back to the US after a dozen years overseas.

That wasn't the end of my time with the Maryland program, though.

In 2001, I contacted Diane Ochs-Oliver to ask if there was a chance that what had by then been rebranded UMUC might be interested in bringing me back for a Term V somewhere interesting. She offered me Bosnia, and, when I explained that what I was looking to do was spend the summer in Europe with my teenaged daughter, said, "Ah, well, how about the Italian Riviera, then?"

So I taught a couple of courses at Camp Darby outside Pisa, plus an every-other-weekend class in Vicenza, and Becca and I had a great time on the beautiful Camp Darby beach and exploring Florence, Siena, Venice, Verona....

UMUC was kind enough to bring me back for three more summers — 2004 in K-Town, 2005 in the middle of the Kuwaiti desert at Camp Buehring, and 2006 in Rota, where it was fascinating to see how much had changed and how much had remained the same since my semester there twenty-four years earlier, in 1982.

When I returned Stateside in 2006, I moved from Cleveland, OH, to Prince Frederick, MD, to take a position with the College of Southern Maryland, and for the

next six years I taught one or two classes a term for UMUC, first at College Park and later online.

By 2012, I was member of the full-time faculty at Northern Virginia Community College, and my responsibilities there kept me so busy that — after thirty-two years on and off with UMUC — I finally left the program.

During those three decades with Maryland, I had the opportunity to teach in Germany, Greece, England, Holland, Spain, Bahrain, Italy, and Kuwait. I taught a course on the USS Coronado as it made a “show the flag” run from Bahrain to Pakistan, and flew back to Bahrain with the admiral of the Middle East fleet and his wife aboard their private plane — which the admiral allowed me to pilot for a thrilling hour! I had the pleasure of working with thousands of students — soldiers, sailors, airmen and airwomen, dependents, contractors, and local nationals — some of whom stay in touch with me to this day. I made many friends — with my colleagues, with Ed Center personnel, with Heidelberg staff — and I made memories that will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Thank you, University of Maryland European Division and UMUC! (And, hey, UMGC, if you ever want me to spend another summer on the Italian Riviera, just say the word and I'll come running!)