

## A Career Change

Kate Pulling  
December 2020

In 1979 I was applying for teaching positions in Economics. The job I had at the time was a 1-year temporary position, filling in for a professor on sabbatical leave. I had gotten a few on-campus interviews, mostly for temporary positions.

While I was in graduate school at University of California, Riverside, I taught for Chapman College's on-base programs on March and Norton Air Force Bases. After three years teaching the typical just-out-of-high-school college students, I realized that I much preferred teaching my Air Force students.

Two of my fellow grad students taught for Chapman College on US Naval vessels. I thought there must be some college or university offering programs for US military based on land outside the US.

A friend had lived at Camp Zama where her father had been stationed and knew University of Maryland had been there. She was able to supply me with the name and address of the ESO, and I wrote him a letter asking which institutions offered classes, and how to contact them. I guess he forwarded my letter, because I soon got a letter from Joe Arden asking me to apply. Later, he asked me to meet him in San Francisco for an interview when he would be passing through on a journey between Japan and College Park. (I don't recall if we ate lunch at a Chinese restaurant – test my chop stick skills.)

Technically, the offer from Maryland was for one year, but renewable. With the choice between a one-year, temporary position at a college in Maine and Maryland's offer for the Far East Division, there was no contest; I accepted Maryland's. In June put my household goods in storage, and I packed for the move to Japan. Then I went to Quito, Ecuador, for a summer Spanish language program. Of course, studying Spanish to go to Japan did not make much sense in the short run, but it had been something I wanted to do.

I knew I had made the right choice when I mentioned to the inventory manager at a favorite bookstore that he would not see me for a while because I was going to Japan to teach for the University of Maryland. He practically flew over the counter to give me a big hug. He said he had gotten his degree from Maryland when he was in the Air Force. A thank-you hug for my going to teach others and a thank-you hug for all his professors.

I found that Maryland students are certainly grateful for the financial benefits and the logistical support of education provided by the military. But they are also grateful for the professors who leave home to join them in the field. In return we professors do our best for our students. (This semester I have a recently retired Air Force Major enrolled in one of my classes at College of Southern Nevada. In conversation during my virtual office hours, I mentioned that I had taught for Maryland overseas. While he had not taken Maryland classes, he praised the opportunities that service members have to pursue their educations. As the conversation ended, he thanked me for my service.)

# Far East Division

## Misawa

For the first two terms in Japan I taught in Misawa. So did Erin Renn who was on the same MAC flight from Travis AFB and we were roommates during welcome and orientation at Yakota. There were a handful of other Marylanders in the same BOQ building. Denise Marshall, an old hand, was Erin's and my guide to Misawa – to the baths, dish shops, camera/film-processing shops, Kanda's BOQ, and the Officer's Wives Club Bazaars. She was also our guide around Tokyo during the break between terms.

While at Misawa Erin and I were asked to judge an English contest at a school near Lake Towada. That was an interesting excursion into Japanese culture and the landscape of Aomori prefecture. The MWR people had tours around the area: to the museum in Aomori, ceramic factories, glass blowing workshops, etc.

Somehow Erin met a Japanese woman in Misawa who owned her own business—a typing service. Her typewriter had a tray of hundreds, if not thousands, of kanji characters carved into metal. She would locate a mechanism over the character she wanted (which would be upside down and backwards), then hit a lever, and the mechanism would grab the character, type it on the paper, then return the character to its slot in the tray. A fascinating process, but slow, even for a professional. Not many years later, personal computers came to support word processing in Japanese. I hope that young, ambitious woman took advantage of the technology, as there would still have been demand for her typing services.

I was on the China Tour over the winter break. We were a curiosity to the Chinese – the country was not very open to foreigners at the time. We were the second group of overseas Americans to travel in China, the first had been the group of Marylanders that gone the year before. (See In Memory comments for James Vickery by Ken Shapiro, Kevin Flanagan, and Ralph Millis.)

As a group, we were well-stocked with the finest camera equipment AAFES and Japanese camera shops could supply. The Chinese relied on local photographers to memorialize family or group visits to “tourist” sites. I found this fascinating and took a series of photos of the Chinese having their pictures taken. It was snapshot of history. Twenty years later when I went to China with my parents, living standards and infrastructure had improved. Alas, there were no local photographers plying their trade. The Chinese were still taking pictures of themselves, but with their own cameras.

Our guides told us that the Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan – they had heard the news on BBC. That invasion serves a benchmark to help me remember when I was in China.

## Okinawa

Terms 3, 4, and 5 I was assigned to Okinawa, teaching classes on Kadena and Torii Station. While somewhat spread out into different buildings, we had a nice community of Marylanders living in BOQs on

Kadena. The classrooms were at the school close by.

Term 3 was a lesson in being flexible. My books and notes that I had sent to Okinawa in mid-December were not found by the post office at Kadena until a couple weeks into the term.

My all-time favorite question in an Economics class came in a class at Kadena. The student, Harold, had been at the NCO Club before class and was a little tipsy. "Dr. Pulling, How many times have you drawn that Big L and that Big X?"

## European Division

After a year in the Far East Division, I was transferred to the European Division. I taught there 1980-1984. The last year must have been as an adjunct, because of the 4-year limitation. Outside of Germany, I had assignments in

- Spain (Zaragoza). My summer in Ecuador paid dividends here. I was able to communicate somewhat in Spanish, although my Spanish landladies laughed at the South American words and phrases I would use.
- The Azores. I signed up for Portuguese classes with Maryland. Written tests are easy if you know some Spanish. I was asked to give a talk about my China trip to a group of Azorean college students. Lucky for me, they were proficient in English. The field rep was very generous to include Marylanders in her family for holidays and for off-base excursions. I played a lot of racquetball. In Frankfurt, deplaning the return MAC flight from Lajes, I overheard a school-aged child of a military family on their R & R leave from The Azores ask his mother where they were. "Germany." After a thoughtful pause, he asked, "How many islands does Germany have?"
- Iceland. There was a blizzard the first weekend I was there. I was snowed-in in the BOQ with only a few snacks on hand; I learned that the place to be when a blizzard hits is the Officers' club. The Field Rep and her family was kind enough to have me join them on excursions out to Thingvellir National Park, the site of the annual meeting of the Althing, the annual parliament of Iceland.
- The Netherlands (classes at AFCENT Brunssum and at Geilenkirshen NATO Air Base just over the border in Germany). Housing was arranged by the Field Rep in a campground that had small cottages, available after the summer season had ended.
- Germany: Berlin, Zweibrücken (Army), Pirmasens, Ramstein, Landstuhl, Bitburg, Heidelberg, Darmstadt, Rhein-Main, Frankfurt (Abrams), Wiesbaden Army, Wiesbaden (Lindsay Air Station), and Hanau (When I asked Rosemary for a map to Hanau, she said a map would not do me much good and handed me turn-right-turn-left directions.)

In Japan and in The Azores and Iceland BOQ housing was available at that time. The campground accommodations in Brunssum were arranged by the Field Rep. In Spain I got a lead on an apartment in a nearby village from the airman who processed some paperwork. In Germany, I "inherited" housing from Marylanders who were moving to their next assignment: Kindsbach, Bad Soden, and a village near Bitburg. In Wiesbaden, I joined many other Marylanders the American Arms Hotel.

Commuting became a major part of the job in Europe, as opposed to Japan. A noon class at one base and evening classes at other bases were not uncommon. It was harder to have many

interactions with the local communities as I experienced in Japan.

One of the benefits of teaching for Maryland was the possibility to take Maryland classes. I took Portuguese in The Azores and an Art class from Jean Mandola at Lindsey Air Station in Wiesbaden. In Term 2 in 1983 I signed up for CAPP 105 Introduction to BASIC Programming, offered at Abrams Complex in Frankfurt at a convenient time. By the third week I was hooked, even obsessed. I was dreaming about programming. Eventually, I took additional Maryland computer classes: FORTRAN, Unix, and Computer Architecture.

I did not realize it at the time, but this Maryland programming class would be the catalyst for a new career in technology. No more supply and demand curves (Big L & Big X), eventually. This is a significant way that teaching overseas affected my life.

After that class CAPP 105, I started programming for recreation. I developed a computer program to make statistics less tedious. (I gave a copy of the program to the European Division. I hope it was used.) Kevin Flanagan and I exchanged experimental computer programs through the mail.

In September 1984, I left University of Maryland to teach for Boston University's Overseas Graduate Program. In the nine years I taught for BU I had assignments in Germany, Italy, Belgium, England, The Netherlands, and France. Initially I was teaching Managerial Economics and Macroeconomics in the graduate program in Business Administration. Gradually I moved to teaching less Economics and more Statistics and Production Management in that same program.

Based on my programming experience, in 1986 I volunteered to develop a new course in the MS(BA) program: Computers for Management. For this I needed to expand my knowledge to include spreadsheets (Lotus) and databases (dBASE). For these I was self-taught. From 1987 to 1993 I had sole responsibility for ongoing curriculum development and teaching of the course.

In 1988 I decided to take advantage of Boston University's tuition remission program offered to its employees. I enrolled in the MS in Computer Information Systems program. In June 1990, after completing the 10 required courses, I graduated with an MS(CIS) degree, ceremony held at Patrick Henry Village. I started teaching a course in the CIS program as well.

Upon returning to the States in August 1993, we moved to Las Vegas, Nevada. There were no teaching jobs open at UNLV or at the community college. I was able to get a job with Computer Sciences Corporation that had a contract with EPA for a computer system that tracked samples related to Super Fund sites.

After two years with CSC, I applied for two advertised teaching positions at College of Southern Nevada. One in the Economics program, one in the Computing and Information Technology department. I accepted an offer from CIT long before the Econ people started reviewing applications. That was 25 years ago, and I still have a few more to go.