

GRAD SCHOOL ON THE ROCK

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My first posting with the University of Maryland's Asian Division, in 1979, was to Okinawa (aka “The Rock”). Home to more than half of the US military forces stationed in Japan, that sizeable population was able to support a wide range of undergraduate courses as well as a program offering a master's degree in Counseling. As a psychologist with a math background, I was assigned to Okinawa to teach courses in Research Design, Testing, and Statistics in that grad program. As a new faculty member, I was impressed with the support—logistical, emotional, and academic—readily extended to me by the Resident Graduate Professor. We became friends and, years later, visited each other when she worked in London and I lived in Madrid.

The graduate program filled three of the four spaces in a Quonset hut: our classroom, office, and library. Yes, we even had a library! Furthermore, we had a reel-to-reel, black and white video recorder to tape students' practicum sessions for later review and feedback. Another appreciated resource on the island was the availability of other faculty from many different disciplines for a stimulating social community (and prized relationships that continue to this day).

Most Maryland courses met twice a week, 150 minutes at a time, for eight weeks, like a kind of eternal summer school. Many of the graduate courses, though, had the luxury of meeting once a week over sixteen weeks, plenty of time to process advanced content well. There were two class periods squeezed in between the students' workday and 10:30 p.m. After once teaching Statistics in the second period, I told administration that I was quite willing to teach until 10:30 p.m., but not with Statistics. Students who had worked all day and attended an earlier class were too burnt out to take in new statistical concepts well before 10 p.m. My request was honored.

Teaching with this program also served as the launching pad for me to join a Maryland faculty tour to China over the 1970-80 holiday break. This was still a time when eager English students would immediately accost us on the Shanghai Bund to practice conversation, when people would nearly fall off their bicycles to see foreigners in their neighborhood. Site tours would always begin with an orientation lecture and tea before we would be sent out into the winter cold of, say, the Forbidden City with scarce restrooms. Two of the Chinese we met on this trip remain in touch and are living, as citizens, in the United States today (one sponsored by myself and the other by another Maryland colleague).

I rotated back to this program the next fall, and the following spring I was appointed to the Resident Graduate Professor position myself. This was an exciting opportunity to

supervise the students, both inside and outside the classroom. These were mature, talented adults, who were preparing themselves for a second career, in anticipation of retiring from the military in their forties. All in all, the situation created great team spirit. A few months after taking the helm of this program, the department chair from Maryland came for a site visit. Who was this stringer the Asian Division had put into place? To my great relief, the chair (who himself had been Resident Graduate Professor there years before) and I hit it off and became lifelong friends.

My team included a secretary and a part-time librarian. The latter was in Okinawa accompanying her husband, another psychologist, who was a visiting lecturer at the local Japanese national university, a position for which he recommended me and in which I followed him, after he departed. In that position, I had the opportunity to conduct some memorable intercultural gatherings, such as the Halloween Open House I hosted for my Japanese students and my Maryland colleagues. Each group was entertained and amused by the creativity of the other's costumes.

After teaching at the Japanese university and working in Spain for a year, I returned to the Asian Division and my home there teaching the fall semester at the grad program. Now, more than thirty years later, it is rewarding to still be in touch with some of the students I met there, and it is gratifying to know how they have put that education to use in their lives.