

Online Pioneer - A Global Nomad with a Mission

Lucia Worthington
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success@lworthington.com)

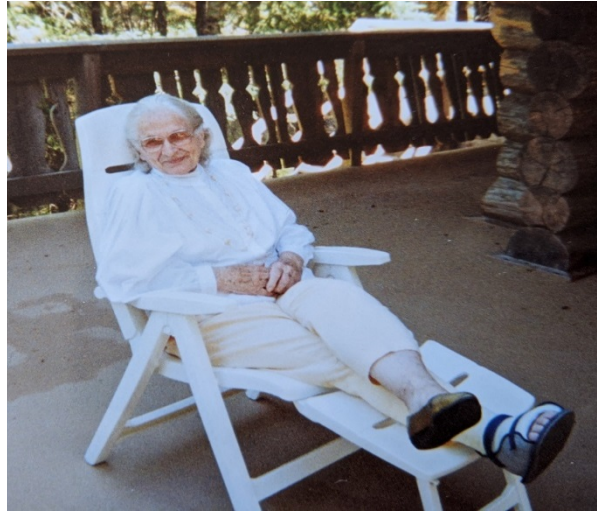
The miracles of technology allowed me to return to family responsibilities while staying connected with my UMUC students. I had anticipated needing to go back to take care of a mother in her last years. Financially independent yet sparse in resources, this required a need to find work in a new place where I had never lived – Victoria, British Columbia. Nevertheless, I enjoyed dual citizenship in Canada and the U.S. I had first immigrated to Vancouver, B.C. Canada as a child and then moved to the U.S. in Seattle with a young family. But, it was a scary situation to start working in a new place when many considered people my age “over the hill”.

Transitioning from UMUC in Europe was tough. I would miss many things – colleagues, students, spontaneous trips to new places, Broetchen, gelato, Schafskaese donner kabobs, open markets and much more. It was a culture shock to enter a place where tradition reigned, and people seemed to look and act the same.

My mother waited for me tearfully and with great relief. She needed me now, it was my turn to care for her. I wanted to help make what she had left of her life - pleasant and fun - with drives along the waterfront and pigeons on the windshield eating the breadcrumbs I placed there. I had a year with her. It was a good year.



The log cabin where I taught remotely for UMUC in 1997 with my mother nearby



Mother in her last year near me as I taught online for UMUC from Canada in 1997

Teaching online as my main source of income created challenges. I sought additional work in the Canadian university system and was fortunate when hired by Simon Fraser University in Vancouver B.C... The Canadians found my experience with UMUC extremely valuable. I was soon hired by two other Canadian universities to be their online pioneer – at very lucrative pay - to design online courses or teach remotely from Vancouver Island.

But, my heart and main teaching was still with UMUC and my students in Europe. Compared to today's standards, online teaching was still in a primitive stage in 1997. It was a time of pre-web- based classrooms and basically an email course. Computers had limited memory, emails often crashed, requiring lengthy help desk discussions. As we moved to a basic web format with UMUC there were compatibility software issues and an "information highway" that was more like a country lane. It was slow and temperamental. It took time, patience and frequent upgrading to move forward with this teaching delivery system.

I moved into town after my mother died to be near the legislative buildings (Victoria is the capital of British Columbia) to take advantage of the more sophisticated technology available in the city. One had to be within ten blocks of the capital buildings to get on the super information highway – so I did that. My Internet access was much improved, and my work expanded into the consulting field with other universities. My online teaching for the rest of my time in Canada took place overlooking the Strait of Juan de Fuca with its sea traffic of ocean liners, sailboats, kayaks, and the occasional pods of killer whales. Evenings with spectacular sunsets made online teaching a time of grace. I was blessed.

Soon UMUC had their own web platform called Web-Tycho which they improved continuously. There were few dull moments as the technology evolved. My Canadian clients experimented with numerous other platforms– all were continually upgraded as well. UMUC changed policy on teaching for Europe remotely and I was then asked to teach for their home campus in Adelphi, MD. Sadly, I missed my military students in the European Division. Many students were now in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some in the remote war zones experienced many "Internet down times" when access to the web was limited or cut off because of security issues.

Teaching for home campus in Adelphi brought a series of new opportunities to get involved with UMUC – even remotely. When the Maryland state legislature initiated shared governance, for the UM system, I

ran for office – remotely and was elected to the UMUC faculty council. This required online meetings and then a few meetings at the home campus in Adelphi. In an election in Adelphi I was elevated to serve as the chair of the UMUC advisory council which served as an umbrella for the staff, student and faculty councils at UMUC. My responsibilities increased to have monthly discussions with then President Heger and to maintain contact with all three councils. I was required to officiate at graduation which was held in College Park. Graduation ceremonies have always been an important verification of my work as an educator. Teaching rarely gives us opportunities to see what we have done. But graduations gave me great joy to witness the success of our students as they graduated.

I left Canada to move back to the U.S. and be close to our UMUC headquarters in September of 2005. It was 15 years after starting with UMUC. I would now teach on their home campus after teaching in all divisions - Asia, Europe - Schwaebisch Gemuend's (SG) international campus, and online from Canada. I welcomed this opportunity and enjoyed working in the D.C. area for the next four years.

Living in Alexandria, I taught both at College Park and the Shady Grove facilities in Rockville Maryland. These were challenging commutes on the beltway. I soon learned to avoid the six lane traffic jams during peak hours to leave before that time and sit in some cafe near my classroom to prep for my evening classes. This was a bit of nostalgia of traffic avoidance I practiced in the European Division when I would arrive at a Popeys restaurant in Mainz, Germany in mid-afternoon and combine office hours with classroom prepping. My gypsycholar personality transferred well to UMUCs home campus.

In 2005 most of my classes were taught face-to-face. But we soon transitioned to hybrid classes that allowed more flexibility for our students who tended to have time consuming government careers and long commutes to their respective office. Hybrid courses were seamless for me. I worked under the direction of Spedden Hause who I respected greatly as a fair supervisor/department chair. He asked me to become course chair for their core courses in management – Fundamentals in Management and Strategic Management to oversee these courses and become a sort of mentor to the faculty who taught them. This responsibility verified me as an educator both intellectually and emotionally. It was another highlight in my career with UMUC.

Some of my students were still in the military and stationed at Quantico, the Pentagon and other sites around D.C. But a large percentage of students worked for various government agencies around D.C. All were bright and worked hard to increase their options in life.

Field trips became part of the norm in the D. C. area –they were popular but optional in consideration of the students' busy lives. They included lectures at various think tanks, the World Bank where we met Tom Friedman who autographed his book for us and the Washington Post that had an event for authors who had written books on business issues.

On a personal level I went into action as is my trait, to explore the region – specifically historical sites. Civil war site visits included hours at Harpers Ferry, Manassas, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, and Petersburg. The saddest place for me was Antietam - a place of horrendous slaughter. I got a sense of closure to this sacrificial war in Appomattox. My visits to the Underground Railroad museum in Cambridge Maryland and the Fredrick Douglas House in D.C. added to my understanding of the Civil War.

Washington D.C. proved to become one of my favorite places. It was an amazing walking place. Walks included leaving the Arlington Cemetery to cross the bridge towards the Lincoln Memorial and then walk the National Mall – stopping at a Smithsonian Museum from time to time. I visited over 20

Smithsonian museums including the D.C. Zoo over my time there. I joined the U.S. Institute of Peace to take courses there and become a fellow of USIP. Summer concerts offered many free options in D.C. and Virginia. All it required was to bring your own expandable lawn chair and feet to tap to the music which was mostly blue grass music in Virginia. The D.C. area will long stay in my heart for memorable places.

Family responsibilities beckoned again to be with a daughter who had mobility issues. I returned to be near her in Washington State at the entrance of the Columbia River Gorge. It is a beautiful area in my land of blue and green with big snowcapped mountains framing the outdoor scene.

It was here in Washougal – the Native American name for Running Water - that I finally planted my garden while continuing to teach for UMUC online. I did so for another four years but UMUC policies had changed again and regrettably I no longer taught for UMUC after 2013.

Happily, I still get emails from former students who tell me where they are. One student wrote to me from Guam thanking me for giving him a reference which helped his application to become an officer after leaving Quantico in Virginia. He made my day! Teaching to me is all about the students. I relish when I hear from them.

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