

The University of Maryland European Division, A Life-Altering Experience

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In 1969, I was a lawyer with a large Wall Street law firm. I made the decision to leave that firm and to become a lecturer with the University of Maryland, European Division. As it turns out, that was a life-altering decision.

Prior to that I had only been out of the United States twice, both times to touristy places in Mexico. I had never been on a military base.

In January, 1970, I returned briefly to the United States to marry a woman I have been dating and we returned together to Heidelberg to meet with Vida Bandis, and shortly thereafter we drove from there through Austria, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and into Turkey for my first teaching assignment at the Karamursel military base.

I have a Ph.D. in philosophy and a law degree so I was able to teach a variety of philosophy courses and undergraduate courses in law such as business law. My students were mainly young men who enlisted in the military and who wanted to continue their education while serving their country. It required a significant commitment by them as they were working all day on their military jobs and then they had to attend classes in the evenings two days per week for each course that they took plus time on the weekends to study and do their homework.

For me the teaching experience was an interesting one as I exposed my students not only to a variety of academic disciplines but I also exposed them to critical thinking. My wife and I planned to stay with the Maryland program for 18 months because at that time there were very favorable tax provisions if a person stayed out of the United States for at least 18 months and met certain other requirements, which we did. As it turned out, the Maryland program was so terrific that we wound up staying 3 ½ years where I taught 8 months in Spain (Rota and Torrejon), 8 months in Turkey (Karamursel and Incirlik in Adana), two months in Oslo, Norway, 6 months in Asmara, Ethiopia (Kagnew Station) and 8 months at a variety of bases in different cities in Germany.

I am not going to discuss some of the fantastic churches, mosques, Hindu temples and museums we saw while we were on the Maryland program. Nor will I expound upon the fabulous foods we ate or the many things we did. However, the University of Maryland European Division exposed us to various cultures that we could not have been exposed to had I taught in the United States. For this reason, I will mention two such experiences that were particularly meaningful to me and which have been important to my wife and me in the 50 years that we have been married.

In 1970, we were walking in Izmir, Turkey. We wanted to visit one of the mosques. In Turkey the mosques are open. We had a map but still weren't sure which way to go.

We stopped a fellow on the street who is about 6 years younger than we are and we asked him if he speaks English or French. He said that he speaks a little English. We asked him where the mosque we wanted to see is located. He replied that he is not from Izmir but from Istanbul and that he would ask someone for us. After giving us directions to the mosque he asked us if we would be willing to sit down and have a cup of tea with him as he wanted to practice his English. Of course, we agreed.

We spent an hour with him talking about Turkey, my teaching in Karamursel, and things in general. He was a delight. When we ended our conversation with him he told us that he wanted us to come to his home in Istanbul when we were next in Istanbul, which we did. He lived with his parents who were absolutely delightful and besides Turkish his mother spoke French and his father spoke 15th century Spanish. His mother made a spectacular dinner of extraordinary Turkish hors d'oeuvres, a huge sit down dinner and lovely wine. His name is Izzet.

We continued see Izzet on weekends in Istanbul while I taught at Karamursel. To make a long story short, he married, and he and wife have two children. We have been life-long friends. In 1999, Izzet called me and told me that his daughter wanted to come to the States to improve her English. We told him that she could stay with us for a week in Chicago and then we would put her in an international women's dormitory at Northwestern or the University of Chicago. She turned out to be extremely nice and we had her live with us for the entire summer of 1999.

In 2007, she got married and we were invited to return to Istanbul for her wedding. There were at least 500 people at the wedding. Unbeknown to us, we were one of 12 people in the wedding party. To this day we are very close to Izzet and his family and we have several other sets of close friends in Istanbul, one of who is a lawyer in Istanbul who got her Masters of Law Degree at Northwestern, whom we speak with at least once a week, who has stayed with us, and whom we call "our Turkish daughter." We have returned to Turkey several times and have traveled extensively in the country. Each year we are invited by Turkey's Chicago Consul General to the Turkish Independence Day celebration in Chicago which we attend.

Another wonderful experience we had while I was teaching for the University of Maryland European Division was in 1971 when we drove to Rota, Spain where I was going to teach at the naval base there. We met a fellow who had signed up for one of my courses, and we asked him where we should live while I was teaching at Rota. He said that there were three possibilities. He recommended the town of Rota because the naval base was in that town so just about everyone spoke English there. His second suggestion was Puerto de Santa Maria, which then was about 20 minutes from Rota. He liked that town because then about half of the people were Americans and half were Spanish so that we could learn some Spanish while being able to speak English when we needed to. Finally, he said that there was a small village called Chipiona off of a dirt

road which he did not recommend because no Americans lived there and only Spanish was spoken in the town. That is where we moved to.

We really enjoyed our experience there. The butano for our stove was delivered by donkeys and the local people were very nice to us. We spoke no Spanish when we arrived but we took a quick two week Spanish course and we learned the language quickly although we did not become fluent. As a result of living there we now have traveled extensively throughout most of South and Central America. We never take tours or cruises. Instead we do it all ourselves. My wife was a lawyer before she retired and she had business dealings in that part of the world as a result of being able to speak Spanish. We particularly love the real Mexico and Guatemala.

Not only have we had fabulous world adventures thanks to my teaching at the University of Maryland European Division, but when we returned to the United States I continued teaching, this time as an Adjunct Professor of Law at Northwestern University School of Law while also practicing law full time as a trial lawyer when I was a partner at three separate law firms here in Chicago.

In addition, we totally enjoyed the faculty at the University of Maryland European Division, and we have made life-long friendships with Serge and Susan Shewchuk, Jack and Ruth Ellen Wennersten and Liz and Albert Turner.

Thank you University of Maryland European Division for enriching our lives.