

Moron and Dunoon

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November 2020

As a gypsy scholar, I had many advantages in appreciating the local culture. I was embedded in the community by virtue of the role I had. I started off a stranger, and particularly in southern Spain and in western Scotland, my connections multiplied. In both places, I got to know many folks who had lived their lives there.

I took a bus the forty miles from where I lived in Seville down to the vast but nearly empty base at Moron de la Frontera. In 1968, four thousand people had populated that airbase. In 1972, all skilled people had been reassigned, and the few left painted rocks and groomed shrubs. (At San Pablo, the situation was similar, with only a single building open on the base, in which to hold classes.) My students at these two almost-closed bases were generally anxious, school-resistant men. In these classes, I had the privilege of being the early introducer of ideas. In the US history intro at Moron, especially, I felt like an entertainer, whose tale was the plot twists of the American saga. Elections especially were cliff-hangers, and the drama of the approaching sectional division north and south brought lots of apprehension. Everything was new – a mention of the Scopes trial ended up by my laying out the theory of evolution, and I often stayed on well after class, since my class members were not pressed by their schedules.

It was the bus ride itself that promoted my own education. Spanish food service workers rode that bus and we walked the distance to the gate of the base together. They were friends of Ruth Knighton, the education program director, and we ate lunch with them, a delicious meal of gazpacho, fish and squid, salad, and flan. I got to know Manolo this way, an older man

with good English, who told me over the months his family's painful Civil War story. As the spring progressed, the view out the bus window, of olive and orange groves and grape arbors, also revealed beautiful expanses of wildflowers. First pink, yellow, and blue blossoms filled the air with a sweet smell, and after Easter, red poppies bloomed as far as I could see over the hills and fields on the way to Moron.

That spring I celebrated the Feria with friends who had a caseta in which to watch the flamenco dancers and the caparisoned horses and riders going by. I bought three bright-colored finches from a street seller. These friends were a combination of Spaniards and Greeks, so with them I celebrated a second Easter, from meeting to eating the lambs they roasted outdoors in a pit. It was hard to say goodbye, but I remembered it had been the same in Izmir.

In Scotland, a new factor came into play, that I could truly understand the language. People from the Navy and from Lockheed had lived in the small town of Dunoon for years, and had close friends, so I got to celebrate two more holidays to the full, Hogmanay or New Year's Eve, and Robert Burns' birthday, both terrific compensations for being on the North Atlantic coast in mid-winter. I found Scottish people inspiringly unselfconscious. They recited poetry and sang songs, all ages joining in, without the slightest demurrer. The emotional resonance of this steady performing, and the fun of it, really impressed me.

When I returned to the US, the absence of stimulation from all directions felt like an abyss. The closest experience I have had to that was suddenly entering the pandemic lockdown. Of course, I also worked hard very hard in Europe, feeling responsible to many students, staying up late in an effort to meet their high hopes for their education. That intensity ebbed too, as I started work on my dissertation with a few part-time jobs.

I did return to Izmir, and worked at Zaragosa and Torrejon and Athens, wonderful assignments all, yet my older self could not quite re-capture the intensity of my first years.