

The Splendid Quarter-Century

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In the late 1970s, I worked at the Haunted Mansion, Walt Disney World. To exit that ride, Guests step out of their Doom Buggy cars and onto a moving conveyer belt. An employee is always on the belt to ensure Guest safety. So many times during those years, I'd walk the unload belt worrying about my future (I had no aspirations with Disney), but also entertaining myself by imagining what it might be like to land in a foreign country. To my immense good fortune, UMUC, over a course of 26 years, provided me with more landings in more foreign countries than I can count!

Halloween was on Saturday in 1987. I was told about UMUC at a costume party that night. Two days later, I was on the phone with College Park. An interview followed just a few months later, in April 1988. I sent 13 letters of recommendation. Oh, how I wanted Europe! I got Asia. That was a blessing.

I thoroughly enjoyed the Asian Division. It was the beginning of my charmed existence, as proved by my first assignment . . . Australia in August 1988. Actually, I was supposed to go to Misawa in Japan first. That was changed to Tokyo. When I read "Australia" on my nametag the first day of Orientation, I was near swooning with fear that it was a mistake. I'm still in touch with my very first field rep; she was my introduction to all things Aussie.

The Asian Division years established the pattern of two-term assignments for me. Moving so often meant that boxes and bubble wrap became fast friends. Good-byes can be hard; however, I knew that something exciting would be waiting at my next "home." I was never lonely because our fine field reps and excellent students kept me entertained and challenged. And how satisfying it was to live in Australia, Japan, South Korea (for an unusual six terms at Osan AB), the Philippines, and Kwajalein.

After five years in Asia, I transferred to the European Division in 1993. My 21 years in that Division could be seen as the climax of my life, if that doesn't seem premature. I was usually found at various sites in Germany or Italy – but the Netherlands, Iceland, and Hungary must also be added. Being the University's first instructor in Afghanistan was a treat: it provided me with 15 minutes of in-house celebrity! I would have been the first, and not the second, Marylander in Iraq if I'd been quicker onto the tarmac in 2008. Back in Europe, dear to my heart were my apartments in Vicenza and Aviano, Italy, and in little Katzweiler in Germany. The pull of many friends in Europe continues strong: I've been back three times to visit since removing to the States in 2014.

Obviously, this memoir is more biographical than anecdotal. My overseas "Life of continu'd Variety" was so full of incident that too many crowd my memory. I do like to remember a snowfall at Camp McGovern in Bosnia because it was the most beautiful I've ever seen. My apartment in Bahrain was so large I joked about having to leave little caches of hallway food for the long journey between the living room and my bedroom. Some memories have taken on the golden patina of nostalgia, while the events, themselves, weren't as pleasant at the time . . . why, oh, why did I believe that punching a red button (covered by a plastic dome, no less) would open the door between wagons on my Japanese train? My blunder produced both The Alarm That Wouldn't Stop and nasty glares from the other passengers. On a picnic in Australia, I casually used the word "fanny" in conversation. Dead silence, followed by a small

field rep voice that said, “I **really** need to speak with you, Ray.” What kind of country allows an innocuous word like that to be obscene?

At last calculation, I moved something like 55 times courtesy of UMUC. Preparing for the next relocation became an art form. People have asked if I ever became irritated with the University for “yanking” me around from site to site. Not one bit! Any institution that allowed me to live in fascinating places, meet interesting people, and teach compelling subjects has my complete loyalty. My dreams of foreign travel while at the Haunted Mansion could never rival the reality I lived. Thank you, UMUC!