

## YOU'RE HIRED!

### A Personal Perspective on the Quirks, Vagaries, & Joys of the UMUC Hiring Process

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In 1969, Tom Hudgins was drafted out of graduate school at the University of Texas in Austin, into the U.S. Army. A few months after basic training, he was sent to fight the Cold War in Germany instead of the much hotter conflict in Vietnam. While stationed at Campbell Barracks in Heidelberg, headquarters of the U.S. Army in Europe (USAREUR), he soon discovered that the University of Maryland offered courses to soldiers on base. Later that year, I joined him in Heidelberg, and we were eventually married in Basel, Switzerland—by the same city official who (as we learned 40 years later) also presided at the weddings of three other Americans who would be instrumental in my dual careers as a University of Maryland professor and a writer.

After Tom completed his two years of military service and was discharged from the army in Germany, we lived for a while in the Scottish Highlands before returning to the U.S. for Tom to finish his master's thesis in Economics, which had been interrupted by the military draft. But during our time in Europe, we'd been seduced by the lifestyle, scenery, foods, cultures, and histories of the places where we'd lived and traveled, from the north coast of Scotland to southern Spain, from Germany, France, and Italy to Andorra, Belgium, and the Netherlands. We wanted to return to Europe as soon as we could find a way to do it.

I already had a master's degree and additional graduate work in Political Science, with specializations in Russian Studies and U.S-Soviet Strategic Studies. And both of us had been teaching fellows at our universities in the U.S., where we discovered that we loved teaching. So our goal upon returning to America was for Tom to finish his master's degree in one semester, then for both of us to get hired by the University of Maryland's European Division. We figured that job would be the perfect fit for our skills and our desire to live abroad.

But we ended up taking a detour along the way. While Tom was finishing his degree at the University of Texas, I decided to take courses in the Department of Radio-Television-Film. UT/Austin was one of the top four film schools in the country (along with USC, UCLA, and NYU), and studying film there was an exhilarating new challenge for me. During my first semester in the program, Tom crewed on the short films I was making for class assignments—and discovered his own love of (and talent for) filmmaking. After much discussion, we decided to put on hold our dream of teaching for the University of Maryland in Europe and focus on getting master's degrees in Film Production at UT.

Yes, there's a point to this long story. All of those factors—Europe, graduate study, part-time teaching jobs and media production gigs to help pay for graduate school—finally dovetailed to make our dream of working for the University of Maryland abroad come true.

But it took three-and-a-half years in the U.S. before we made it back to Europe. During our final year of grad school, to help finance our master's degree project, we took media-production jobs at a public health agency in another state. We also won a grant in a national competition to make a documentary film for the U.S. Information Agency. But we were still chomping at the bit to return to Europe. As soon as our thesis project and the USIA film were completed, we sent off for a copy of the University of Maryland catalogue, confirmed that they still offered courses at military bases abroad, and started plotting how we could convince them to hire us.

Opportunity awaited: The University of Maryland didn't offer any courses in Radio-Television-Film (RTVF) in Europe or Asia at that time (1975). So we put together a complete proposal for a set of courses for credit in the RTVF Department, to be taught by us: course syllabi; recommended textbooks and suggested readings; a list of all the 16mm films (plus projectors and portable screens) that the university would need to purchase for showing those films in class, in a "movie theater setting" (this was long before most films were available on videotape or DVD); a budget for the entire program; and our résumés, which stressed our qualifications for teaching in three fields, Political Science, Economics, and Film. The whole package was nearly two inches thick.

We mailed it at our local post office and went back to focusing on our day jobs. Two weeks later we received a phone call from Julian Jones, Assistant to the Dean for Overseas Programs, asking us to come to College Park for an interview. The university would even pay our air fare and hotel bill!

Tom wasn't sure what to wear to the interview. In film school and even at the state agency where we worked, attire was very casual. He hadn't worn a suit in years (not even at our wedding), and the only one he owned was long out of style. I suggested that he'd look just fine in a nice pair of dark-brown corduroy pants, a light brown rib-knit turtleneck sweater, and his four-pocket, medium-brown leather sports coat. After all, he was a filmmaker, not a banker. No pinstriped suit required.

Back then, people invited to interviews for full-time teaching positions with Maryland's overseas divisions were interviewed by the relevant department chairs at the College Park campus, the flagship institution of the University of Maryland's statewide system. Our interview was scheduled with the chair of the Radio-Television-Film Department, and we assumed that we'd have to meet with the chairs of Economics and Political Science, too.

Instead of scheduling the interview in his office, the RTVF chair sent a message to our hotel inviting us to join him for lunch in the College Park faculty dining room. Arriving early, we were shown to the table he'd reserved for us. A few minutes later, he showed up—wearing the *exact* same outfit that Tom had on. The two men looked at each other in silence for several long seconds, then both of them burst out laughing.

The three of us had a delightful lunch together, swapping stories on a wide range of topics. The only inkling of an "interview" was his telling us that we were the first people with

film degrees and actual filmmaking experience to apply for teaching positions with Maryland's overseas divisions. A few other professors in the English Department had taught a course in "Film as Literature," but his own department did not count it for credit in RTVF. By the end of that meal, I figured we had a good chance at the job.

Right after lunch we were scheduled to meet with Julian Jones at his office. Apparently the RTVF chairman had already phoned him in advance, because Julian greeted us effusively and started talking about salaries, benefits, teaching load, and logistics overseas. "But what about interviews with the Political Science and Economics departments, too?" we asked. "Oh, that's taken care of," said Julian, adding that our university degrees and teaching experience in those fields qualified us for teaching those courses, too. So we were hired on the spot, to start up Maryland's new film program in Europe and teach in our other areas of expertise, as needed.

That first experience with Maryland's hiring process taught us several things: The university valued what later came to be called "professor-practitioners," people who had actual work experience, outside the classroom, in the fields they were teaching. The overseas divisions weren't stuffy academic ivory towers, and their hiring practices could be flexible. The official name of the institution hiring us was University of Maryland University College (UMUC)—a somewhat redundant mouthful that everyone just shortened to "Maryland" (or "You-Muck") in casual conversation. Later we also learned that many administrators had an appreciation for good food and wine, and important deals were often made over meals.

So in August, 1975, we joined 53 other newly hired UMUC European Division professors—the largest single contingent ever hired by the overseas divisions in one year—at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland for the flight to Rhein-Main Air Base in Germany. I must have seen too many old black-and-white World War II movies, because I assumed we'd be flying across the Atlantic in a military transport plane, seated on canvas webbing attached to the fuselage, with parachutes available in case of emergency. Instead, we were ushered onto a standard commercial airliner along with dozens of civilian employees, military spouses, and whining children. I'll never forget the powdered-egg "omelets" and *faux* orange juice the cabin crew served us for breakfast the next morning, an hour before the plane landed in Germany.

Before leaving the U.S., we had to get a basic civil service security clearance to allow us to work on American military bases. In addition to filling out an official form, we had to be fingerprinted at our local police station. We assumed that getting those low-level security clearances would be *pro forma*, since Tom had held a Secret clearance in the army, and I'd had a Top Secret clearance as a U.S. government intern a few years before. But whatever agency was now processing our clearances kept rejecting my application because the fingerprints weren't good enough. So, after I'd already begun teaching for UMUC in Europe, I kept having to go to the military police offices on base to get fingerprinted again...and again...and again, every time my application form was sent back to me. Meanwhile, I wondered how much time and money the government was spending to track down and verify the seventeen different addresses in four states and four foreign countries where I'd lived since my senior year in high school, which I'd also been required to list on that form.

I taught for more than a year with the European Division before those requests for fingerprints quit coming. Maybe by then they'd finally verified all my previous addresses, too. But by that time I'd already added three new ones, in Germany, Spain, and Greece—thanks to teaching assignments with UMUC. The whole security clearance process had taken longer than getting hired for the job itself.

For three years (1975-1978) we enjoyed working as "gypsy scholars" in the European Division, "living out of a suitcase, teaching out of a briefcase," as the job was often described. During those three years, UMUC assignments took us to a total of fifteen different military bases (several of them more than once), from Germany and Spain to the Greek island of Crete. And in summers we traveled on our own all over western Europe, including a 10,000-mile road trip from our Term IV assignment in Madrid in the spring of 1976, up the entire west coast of Norway to North Cape above the Arctic Circle, then back through Finland, Sweden, and Denmark to Germany, to re-pack the car for the remaining leg of the journey to our Term I assignment in Crete that fall.

In 1978, UMUC sent us back to Iraklion Air Base on Crete for Terms III and IV. One day in May, at the Education Center on base, we received a surprise phone call from Tokyo. It was from Joe Arden, a man we'd never met, who was director of UMUC's Far East Division (as it was then named). We'd never expressed an interest in teaching in Asia, so we were floored when Arden said he wanted us to start up a film program there, like the one we'd established in Europe. We must have been speechless a bit too long, because the next thing he said was, "I'll give you five days to decide." Then he added a sweetener: "And I promise to send you to a different place in Asia every term." Someone must have told him that both of us had an incurable case of wanderlust.

That was a hard decision to make. We loved living in Europe and had considered trying to prolong our stay there by applying to teach at the University of Maryland's separate residential campus in Munich, Germany, after we'd finished four years with the European Division, the limit (at that time) for working on full-time contracts abroad. Now we had to decide if we wanted to upend our life in Europe and spend our fourth year as full-timers teaching on the other side of the globe.

Tom, who harbored a romantic notion of Japan, convinced me that we'd never get an opportunity like that again. So two months later we were on another military-chartered commercial flight to a new adventure with the University of Maryland, halfway around the world. We didn't even have to interview for the job.

The culture shock of moving from the island paradise of Crete to the densely packed megalopolis of Tokyo was a new experience, but we soon became fascinated by living in a country completely foreign to us. Shortly after we began teaching at Yokota Air Base, Julian Jones came from College Park to Tokyo to visit the university's program in Asia and invited us to lunch at a Japanese restaurant one day. When he noticed that Tom and I had no trouble using chopsticks, he remarked that we seemed to be settling well into life in Asia. I laughed and told him that I'd learned to use chopsticks when I was twelve years old, and Tom (who loves to eat) learned fast during our first few days in Japan ("So I wouldn't starve," he joked). Then Julian told

us about a potential candidate for teaching in Asia that year, whom he'd interviewed in the U.S. by taking her to lunch at a Chinese restaurant. Not only did she not know how to use chopsticks, she had no interest in learning. And hence no job offer from the University of Maryland, either.

Joe Arden was true to his word, assigning us to teach at nine military bases in mainland Japan, Okinawa, and Korea. Our only disappointment was when our assignment to Taiwan was abruptly canceled in 1979, when the U.S. officially recognized the People's Republic of China, the American military suddenly withdrew from Taiwan, and UMUC's program in that country ended. But elsewhere in Asia I finally did get to fly on military transport planes: C-130's, C-141's, and even once on a C-5A Galaxy, supposedly the largest plane in the world, which seemed to take forever to get enough lift to make it off the runway in Korea, much like a puffin taking flight from the surface of the sea.

During Term II in Okinawa we began to face the question of what to do next, after our Far East Division contracts were completed the following summer. Interesting though Asia was, our hearts were back in Europe. But our four years on full-time yearly contracts with UMUC would be finished, and we didn't relish returning to the European Division as adjunct professors (the only option available), at much lower salaries for the same work, and with no guarantee of a job and a paycheck from one term to the next.

Teaching for Maryland's two-year residential program at the Munich Campus in Germany could be the solution. Even though the pay was lower than on a full-time contract in the European Division, there would be more job security and we'd be settled in one place, with fewer expenses. The year before moving to Asia, Tom had taught a European Division course at the military base where the campus was located, and we'd discovered what an interesting city Munich was. So while in Okinawa in 1978, we spent a lot of time putting together a complete proposal for a film program at the Munich Campus, like the ones we'd already done in the European and Far East divisions. Then we mailed off that big packet of materials to Munich—and crossed our fingers.

A month later, we received a standard-size envelope in return, with one sheet of paper in it, a short *pro forma* letter from the dean of the Munich Campus, basically saying "Thank you for your interest in our campus, but we aren't interested in your proposal at this time." That night we drowned our disappointment in way-too-many Mai Tai's at a seaside military recreation center, while shooting pool all night as a distraction from dashed hopes. Then, drunker than I'd ever been in my life, we went out and sat on the beach, watching the sun rise over the ocean and wondering what we'd do next, when our great Maryland teaching adventure was over.

The next two years found us back in Austin, Texas, where Tom taught full time at Austin Community College and took graduate courses in Education at the University of Texas, with the goal of getting a government job as a civilian Education Services Officer (ESO) at U.S. military bases overseas. The UMUC jobs in Europe and Asia had introduced us to many ESOs there, and Tom thought that kind of job could be our ticket abroad again. Meanwhile, we'd kept in touch with several of our friends teaching with UMUC in Europe and Asia, some of whom had even moved into administrative positions with Maryland. And I began to see a possible loophole in the

university's longtime rule limiting full-time professors from teaching for more than four years, total, on UMUC's one-year, renewable contracts.

In early spring of 1981, I sent a letter to the UMUC administration in College Park, pointing out that loophole and suggesting that they could hire us for four more years of teaching in Europe if they agreed with my reasoning. But no reply, not even a note acknowledging their receipt of my letter.

At the end of May, Tom and I returned home to Austin from a three-week road trip in Mexico, exhausted after hours of hard driving and coping with a case of Moctezuma's Revenge. We unpacked the car, fell into bed, and slept for twenty hours straight. Then the phone rang, waking us up.

It was Joe Arden, who was now director of the European Division, calling us from Heidelberg. Tom, groggy from sleep, answered the phone and wasn't certain that he heard the message right. Joe told him that UMUC had considered my letter and agreed that the European Division could hire us back, on the same kind of contract we'd had before. And he wanted us to start in August. "I'll give you two days to decide," said Joe.

That time the decision was easy. Tom gave notice to the college where he was teaching, we found good homes for our three cats, and we drank up all the bottles of German wine we'd recently stocked into our liquor cabinet. Two months after Joe's phone call, we were back at Andrews Air Force Base again, boarding a flight to Europe.

For two years (1981-1983) we were "gypsy scholars" once more, teaching at ten military bases in Germany and Greece. Then Joe Arden called again. This time he was offering Tom a position teaching Economics at the Munich Campus. And I could continue teaching at night in the European Division, at bases within commuting distance from Munich.

We relished living in Munich for the next nine years, where I also began a parallel career as a writer for *The Stars and Stripes* newspaper. But when the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the end of the Cold War, the number of U.S. troops and dependents in Europe was rapidly reduced, and many military bases were closed. McGraw Kaserne, where the Munich Campus was located, closed in 1992, and the Maryland residential program moved to Reese Kaserne in Augsburg, 40 miles away. We moved to Augsburg, too.

But greatly reduced enrollments threatened the future of the new Augsburg Campus. And no one knew how much the continuing U.S. military drawdown in Europe would impact UMUC's other programs there, too. So when we heard that the university was seeking American professors for Maryland's non-military education program recently established in Siberia and the Russian Far East, we sent a letter of application to the director of UMUC's International Programs, in College Park.

We thought our qualifications would make us especially competitive for positions in Maryland's new endeavor, a joint Russian-American undergraduate degree program in Business

and Management, for Russian students at two major state universities, in Vladivostok and Irkutsk. Tom's experience in teaching Economics and Business-Government Relationships was especially relevant, as were the courses I had taught in Advertising and Consumer Behavior. In addition, my university degrees in Political Science had focused on Russian Studies, so I was already knowledgeable about the country we'd be living in. And both of us had long ago proven our "flexibility" (a term beloved by UMUC administrators) at adapting to different cultures, languages, and challenges, both inside and outside the classroom.

Once again, no response from the UMUC administration. A couple of months after applying for the job, we finally wrote to Joe Arden in Heidelberg to ask if he knew anything about the status of hiring for the new Russia Program. A month later, we got word that Joe was going to be in Augsburg and wanted to know if we were available for lunch one day. He took us to a Greek restaurant where the rambling conversation veered from Greek foods and wines to his questions about our experiences on various bases in Europe, Tom's classes at the Augsburg Campus, and my recent publishing projects. He also hinted at the bleak outlook for future job opportunities in the European Division because of the military drawdown. And toward the end of the meal, he asked a few general questions about my Russian studies at university more than two decades before.

When Tom and I got back home that day, he looked at me and said, "Was that an interview for the Russia job?" "Yes," I ventured, "That's the way Joe does things. Keep your fingers crossed." I didn't add that during most of the conversation, I had feared Joe was going to tell us this would be our last year with the University of Maryland's programs overseas.

Three months later we were packing our bags again, for a military flight from Germany back to the U.S., then two Aeroflot flights to our new assignment in Russia's Far East.

The three semesters we taught for the Russia Program at Far Eastern State University in Vladivostok and Irkutsk State University in Siberia (mid-1993-early1995) were the crowning adventure of our eighteen years of working for UMUC abroad. And those experiences became the springboard for new careers after we returned to the United States. Tom landed a good position teaching Economics and chairing the department at a top-rated community college, a job that kept the two of us and our cats well fed for the next twenty-some years until his retirement in 2019. I concentrated on writing food, travel, and cultural articles for magazines, newspapers, scholarly journals, and websites.

Two years after we returned to the U.S. from Russia, Julian Jones was instrumental in getting me hired by UMUC to write a commemorative history for the 50th anniversary of the university's education programs for non-traditional students in the U.S. and abroad, *Never an Ivory Tower: University of Maryland University College—The First Fifty Years, 1947-1997*. And in 2007 I was hired by UMUC to write an updated edition for the 60th anniversary: *Beyond the Ivory Tower: The First Sixty Years, 1947-2007*. Both books were published by UMUC, and *Beyond the Ivory Tower* can now also be accessed as a pdf posted on the Gypsy Scholars website of the Overseas Marylanders Association: <http://www.gypsycholars.org/Beyond-the-Ivory-Tower.htm>

I also turned our UMUC experiences into an award-winning travel memoir, *The Other Side of Russia: A Slice of Life in Siberia and the Russian Far East* (2003) and, more recently, the first cookbook published in America about the foods of the Asian side of Russia, *T-Bone Whacks and Caviar Snacks: Cooking with Two Texans in Siberia and the Russian Far East* (2018)—both of those books published by university presses. And since we rode thousands of miles on the Trans-Siberian Railroad between teaching assignments in the Russia Program, I tapped into those experiences when writing a chapter about the history of eating on Trans-Siberian trains, for my latest book (as editor), *Food on the Move: Dining on the Legendary Railway Journeys of the World* (2019).

But our story doesn't stop there. Despite working mainly as a writer after teaching for UMUC for so many years, I missed being in the classroom, sharing my knowledge in "real time" with students eager to learn. So I was pleasantly surprised when I received an email in 2006 from National Geographic Expeditions. They had seen my first book about Russia and were offering me a job as National Geographic's lecturer on Trans-Siberian Railroad tours, traveling by train from my old stomping grounds in Vladivostok, for 6,000 miles across Russia to Moscow, with a detour down into Mongolia along the way. Thanks to my UMUC experiences around the world, at the age of 60 I started a new, completely unexpected career as a speaker on ocean and river cruises, expedition ships, and passenger trains in Europe and Asia. Working for National Geographic, Smithsonian, Viking, Lindblad, Road Scholar, and other organizations that offer educational tours abroad, I've traveled by ship across the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, around the Baltic, Mediterranean, Black, Bering, and Okhotsk Seas, up and down the Danube River, and from the Russian Arctic to Mongolia, Alaska, and Japan on both land and water—including to many of the places where Tom and I taught with the University of Maryland between 1975 and 1995.

So I'm back in the classroom again, although my "classrooms" now are theater auditoriums on cruise ships, conference rooms in foreign hotels, and railroad dining cars temporarily converted into lecture halls, complete with PowerPoint projection and drinks from the bar. And I've had to learn some new skills, too, such as how to keep my physical balance while giving lectures on roiling seas and rough stretches of railroad track. To date, I've worked as a lecturer on 30 tours abroad, sharing my knowledge and experiences with thousands of well-educated, very interested (and interesting) "students" on ships, river boats, and trains. Before the Covid-19 pandemic hit this year (2020), I was scheduled to add six more tours in Europe and Asia. As soon as travel is safe again, Tom and I look forward to dusting off our wanderlust and packing our bags for the next job abroad to—as Joe Arden always liked to say—those "faraway places with strange-sounding names."

#### Dates and divisions of overseas service with UMUC:

European Division (1975-1978; 1981-1993)  
Asian Division (1978-1979)  
Munich Campus (1985, 1989-1992)  
Augsburg Campus (1992-1993)  
Russia Program (1993-1995)

Other: Writer of UMUC history books (1996-1997, 2007)