

First Great White House Tour by UMGC's First Professor Emeritus & Friends

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SKETCH ONE: Background.

All of us have had memorable first life experiences. When I took my first White House tour, with friends on February 27, 2024, at the ripe old age of 79 what an adventure it was! Let Freedom Ring Out!

I was invited to the White House at the invitation of the White House staff well after I had worked 26 outstanding years for Military Forces through the University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC). *Later, I partnered with and became an active member of the Overseas Marylanders Association (OMA), for another 14+ years. It is now four decades of patriotic service. I believe that the UMGC Presidents and Overseas Program Directors and faculty such as myself did in fact change the lives of millions of UMGC military students and graduates.

I have often wondered what the students I taught had achieved in their lives. I am now retired and, due to an unexpected stroke, became paralyzed. At present, I am a handicapped man who travels by wheelchair daily. Because of determination, drive, perseverance and the wheelchair assets, 🦽 🦿 I can say, "Have Steve in a wheelchair and trusty cell phone, will travel."

I have done so and rolled through the White House with pride on the tour with the assistance of Brother David. Together we went to historic places within the White House yet to be explored. Yes, I thought, "I must keep venturing forth with vim, vigor and vitality to accomplish what I can do for God, America, others and for myself."

SKETCH TWO: My White House Perspective.

I found the whole adventure to the White House worthy of becoming one of the important capstone events my life. It surely brought back many past memories and experiences of my work in teaching as a professor without boundaries for UMGC. Those memories in turn, addressed the proud years spent in service given to our American military troops stationed overseas and worldwide in 125 USA military communities in 25 countries.

SKETCH THREE: The Special Bus Ride Happening.

Now, imagine yourself taking the special bus trip with me, who traveled through Washington, DC, our nation's Capital. We stopped and were there at the White House at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

The tour became a reality by way of a special invitation granted to me by a White House Staff member and to whom I am extremely grateful.

On the bus were 15 other senior patriots. To get into the Spirit of the events that were about to happen that day I shouted out, "Let's get into the spirit of the day by saying the Pledge of Allegiance to America" which we all did with great pride. Afterwards, I called again, "Let's sing out loud a few patriotic songs!" Immediately the song that rang out was, "The Spangled Banner," followed by "America the Beautiful" and others.

Afterwards, I shouted, "We now have our great American spirit!"

SKETCH FOUR: The Drive to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue

While enroute to the White House, I spotted a DC Metro Bus advertising the University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC). So I whipped out my cell phone with camera and clicked! Here it is for your viewing!



This sighting had immediate meaning for me. It was an unexpected joy and grand encounter that brought back important past memories of my former UMUC life along with experiences that I treasured while teaching courses in mathematics, computer science, psychology or education, to our military troops in service. I do like academic diversity!

In the days that followed, more vivid lifelong professional and personal memories of my years as Academic Director of Education and Student Teaching Services, who administered, promoted, and delivered high quality education UMGC Overseas programs and services to USA active duty, military personnel and their dependents in the USA, Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines came to mind.

With all these memories in place, I thought, “Being at the White House 2024 was the capstone to all my patriotic duties and services to the military men and women who historically served, are serving and will serve America proudly and with great honor.”

SKETCH FIVE: Arrival Greetings

Upon arriving at the White House, I was greeted by former military and civilian friends in particular, David Bludis (MS, PGK), James Robertson (US Navy, Retired), and his wife, Mary Ann Robertson. They are all from my parish, St. Michael the Archangel Church, The Knights of Columbus (K of C) and the Sodality of Mary.

Now, let the adventure begin!

Yes, we entered the “President’s House.” to “Let Freedom Ring!” We started the adventure by going through the historic photos section called the “Hall of the Presidents,” and saw historic photos of United States Presidents, their families and dignitaries. This included Presidents Biden, Obama and Reagan, to name a few. We then entered and viewed the beautiful Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis “Rose Garden” from the inside looking out. It was Cherry Blossom Time in DC.



We were also graciously hosted by many White House staff and security guards everywhere we went. Although we did not get through all 132 rooms, we walked through the eloquent East, Green, Blue, Red, and State Dining Rooms.



We encountered many presidential portraits, certainly not all, but wishing to see them all, if we could. From the 1960s, I saw the famous portrait of President John F. Kennedy and recalled his famous advice. “Ask not what your Country can do for you, but what you can do for your Country,” To me and generations to come, the Portraits are impressive masterpieces treasures, with outstandingly meaningfulness forever.



As an Educator, I found the Presidential Library to be an extraordinary collection and, indeed, a synthesis of historical writings of all our Presidents lives and works. Yes, our American heritage since 1776.

Seeing the Library, right in front of me, I then closed my eyes. One can only imagine what it was like to have been the President of the United States, in his time, and what were his thoughts about our democratic society and the leadership as “Commander and Chief” he wanted to accomplish in America and in world history.

“The White House Presidential Library,” I thought. “It is all here in the books, documents, writings. Facts and scholarly works.”



SKETCH SIX: What a Fine Exit

At the exit point of the great tour, David, Jim, Mary Ann and I stood proudly in front of the Blue Room and beneath the Presidential Seal, the Flag of the President, and “Old Glory,” The Flag of the United States of America (USA).



SKETCH SEVEN: A Goodbye from White House Security

The last security guard, I met, was pleased to point out the last and exacting White House sign with the quote, “The President House is built for generations to come.” The security guard gave me a big smile and a 👍 good thumbs up for being a guest of the White House. In return, I gave him a salute for his service to America.

ITEMS OF SPECIAL NOTE

ITEM 1: Dressing for the Visit

Knowing that I was going on the tour I dressed smartly and patriotically for the momentous occasion. I donned a blue blazer with patriotic lapel pins for the United States of America, the University of Maryland Global Campus and a Veterans Day pin with, red, white and blue ribbon attached, my American-made hat with the phrase, “One Nation Under God” and a classic tie highlighting, “We the People of the United States of America.” Each item is very special as my enduring witness to Patriotism in America. (Please see picture in the Presidential Library section of this Memoir.)

ITEM 2. Previous UMGC Memoirs.

In my three earlier memoirs, I presented a portion of my UMGC life’s journey, in stories from east to west and north and south from 1984 - 2006.

ITEM 3. My UMGC Photography: A Little-Known Story to Remember.

During my life-long journey at UMGC, I was teaching a mathematics class, the strangest thing began to happen. My retina was becoming detached as I taught and watched the class with one eye. Next, I was

rushed by emergency van to a hospital - an operation imminent, on Monday morning at 10:00 am. While being operated on by Dr. Surgeon Hirikata and under his surgical cloth tent, I prayed, "God, please give me my sight back and I will capture the good things people do for God and others." I did. "It became a blessed passion for me wherever I turned near and far for decades." I gave myself a voluntary long-term mission of photographing the good things UMGC people did for communities they served. Yes, "It was the beauty of seeing the people doing their good deeds for others that make a difference and that really mattered," in the places where I was assigned and served.

The people I served were in the UMGC Academic Community, the Military Community and the Military Services Chapel (Catholic and Protestant), Community. I wanted to serve them well, and did for years, with my trusted camera and cell phone in hand, whenever and wherever I could under six UMGC presidential administrations:

Presidents: T. Benjamin Massey; Gerald Heeger, Susan Aldridge, Javier Miyares and, at present, Gregory Fowler. I enjoyed the opportunities provided by the Directors of Overseas Programs, Joe Arden and Paula Harbecke who supported my efforts throughout my twenty-six years of worldwide service.

ITEM 4: Gifts and Legacy.

As a gift to UMUC I have donated both select personal memorabilia from my UMGC adventures and journeys and my digital pictures (thousands). These materials now reside in the Archives of UMGC, Adelphi, MD.

*This memoir is dedicated to those very special people
 whose hearts, minds and souls were/are blessed
 with an abundance of God's love throughout my life.*

FAMILY HOLOWENZAK

*Father, Stephen & Mother, Helen
 Daughters, Phyllis & Amy Katherine
 Mr. Edward & Mrs. Frances (Sister) Weglarz*