

# My Life Is a Suitcase

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My time teaching accounting and business classes for UMUC from Fall 1994 to Spring 2003 was very memorable and I thoroughly enjoyed thinking back on some of the great experiences.

## **Prior to UMUC**

Working for one of the largest international CPA firms for four years, I had foreign assignments in Saudi Arabia, London and Hong Kong. International travels and experiences became an interest I wanted to pursue further.

I returned to the U.S. to pursue an MBA at Michigan State University, where I had a teaching assistant position. I became interested in teaching and, upon graduation decided to search for a full-time teaching position. When I saw the UMUC recruitment advertisement, I was very drawn to the opportunity.

## **UMUC Recruitment – July 1994**

After an interview in Adelphi and an offer I was even more intrigued. I had a follow-up call from Joe Arden at what was the middle of the night in his time zone in Japan. I later found that was typical for Joe to make similar calls to newly hired faculty.

## **European Orientation**

It was a week of daytime meetings and evening group meals in pubs with great German beer. A great introduction to the UMUC experience in Europe, and I returned to Heidelberg for annual meetings and while in transit to new assignments.

- Germany -1994
  - Bamberg – an Army base where classes were held in one of the old kaserne buildings taken over from the German military after WWII. My first experience teaching active duty military and dependents stationed overseas.
  - Nuremburg – mine were some of the last UMUC classes taught at the base soon to be returned to the German government.
  - Grafenwoehr – a large live ammunition training area near what was once the Iron Curtain. During classes it was not unusual for artillery fire to rattle windows, or to hear A-10s simulating tank attacks.
  - Hoenfels – another training area near the Czech border. During major military exercises students would get a short break to attend class, stack their packs and equipment in the back of the classroom, and learn accounting. One of my students was a big, burly helicopter test pilot, who flew Chinooks after maintenance was performed. Hearing of his experiences he seemed an unlikely person to have a keen interest in accounting, but he did very well in the class.
  - Stuttgart – I taught classes at Kelly Barracks while living at the Schwabisch Gmund UMUC facility.

- Italy - 1995
  - Aviano – it was a very active Northern Italy air base at the time because of the war in Bosnia. I had front row seats for a show with Sheryl Crow, Hilary Clinton, and Sinbad in an aircraft hangar when they stopped en route to entertain troops in Bosnia.
- Belgium - 1996
  - NATO Support Activities – most of my students were dependents of multinational executives or diplomats from many different countries.
  - Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) – A multinational military base where most of my students were active duty U.S. military, and some from other countries. The class six store offered all kinds of European liquors and wines for which they charged no tax. So, I often stocked up on excellent French wine for about \$20 for a case of 12 bottles.

Thoughts on UMUC Europe - teaching for UMUC in Europe I really got the idea that many of my students would not have otherwise had an opportunity to further their education without UMUC and tuition assistance. It made me feel I was involved with a good organization doing something very productive.

And then I volunteered to go to Siberia.

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### **Russian Orientation – July 1996 Adelphi**

Transit – After the orientation we traveled as a group from Adelphi to Seattle, where we stayed overnight, then on to Vladivostok via Magadan, and Anadyr, which were two former Soviet military bases in the Russian Far East. The flight from Vladivostok to Irkutsk aboard a Tupolev TU-154 was my first experience on a Russian plane. Luggage stacked in the isles aisle as we took off did not help build my confidence in Aeroflot.

Irkutsk – I taught accounting, finance, and business strategy to third and fourth-year Russian students in the joint program with UMUC. It was a very competitive program to get into and I had some very high performing students. It was very fascinating to be teaching U.S. business classes to students who grew up under communism. Many business ideas most Americans take for granted were very novel ideas to my Russian students.

I staged a blind “Pepsi Challenge” exercise with my fourth-year students which turned into an international event. Pepsi had been imported into Siberia for many years through unofficial channels, while Coca Cola was very new to the region. The students had never heard of the Pepsi Challenge, and when the Dean of the Siberian American joint program heard about the challenge, he requested a visiting group from Mongolia be allowed to observe. All went well and the students gave me the gift of a matryoshka doll with a large bottle of Pepsi inside.

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**Germany again – Summer 1997** – I taught classes at Schweinfurt while living in Bamberg.

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### Asian Orientation – August 1997

During part of the orientation, Dr. Arden pointed out that many of the faculty and staff had been in the Asian Division for many years. He pointed out that many had either fallen in love with Asia or an Asian. Five years later married my Japanese wife in 2002.

- Korea - 1997
  - Osan Air Base – primarily active duty students on unaccompanied one-year tours.
  - Yongsan – many of my students were traditional college age Korean students, who were then allowed to take UMUC classes.
  - Camp Humphreys – most students were soldiers on unaccompanied 1-year tours. After one class, two students told me they looked forward to coming to class because it was the only time they felt like they were not in the Army.
- Okinawa - 1998
  - Kadena AB – a large base which had enough students to support both lower and upper level classes.
  - Camp Foster -
  - Futenma – Most students here were active duty Marines. One of my Marine students had the memorable and seemingly appropriate name Johnny Savage.
- Kanto Plain - 1999
  - Yokota AB – another base large enough to support both lower and upper level classes on a regularly. I had many students who took six or seven accounting classes from me and I got the feeling that I “belonged” to them.
  - Yokosuka Naval Base – I had many U.S. civilians and family members as students.
  - Camp Zama Army Base – I commuted by train from Yokota.
- Distance Education – 2001-2003
 

I became the Assistant Director of Distance Education at a time when the UMUC DE program was growing rapidly. I also taught DE classes, and many of my upper level classes had students who were stationed around the world.
- Misawa AB – After Siberia, this was the snowiest place I lived. Students were very good, with some very engaging classes.
- Sasebo Naval Base – a rather compact base on Kyushu, which was near Nagasaki and Fukuoka,.

While with UMUC Asia I very much enjoyed attending commencement ceremonies in Tokyo and Okinawa. At each even there were usually several of my students graduating, some after attending UMUC classes over many years. It was good to celebrate their accomplishment and meet their families, some who traveled from the U.S.

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Departure – June 2003 – I got the idea to return to the U.S. and departed Japan to teach at Casper College in Casper, Wyoming.

After one year in the U.S. I again became restless and contacted Joe Arden regarding UMUC Asia.

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Summer 2004 – Korea again

Yongsan – we lived just outside of Yongsan and near Itaewon. Summer classes in a second-floor classroom with no air conditioning was challenging, but the students and I got through it.

Osan – I commuted to Osan AB and saw many changes since I last taught there.

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After two more years in Casper, I returned to Japan in 2006, this time working in the Tokyo office of Stars and Stripes. During 11 years with Stars and Stripes I supported and visited most of the same military bases where I previously taught for UMUC. It was very rewarding to cross paths again with former UMUC students, one who was active duty while a student and had eventually risen to a civilian GS-15 level with DFAS.

I returned to teaching in January 2018 and have been with Napa Valley College since.

**Regarding the title**

If you have read this far you may be interested in the title. While working in London I saw a play titled My Life is a Suitcase at Sloan Square Theater, and it seemed appropriate in describing some of my overseas adventures.

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