

## Thoughts on the "Cobblestone Campus"

(written by Kent Price at the request of Circe Woessner for use as a preface to the forthcoming third book in her series on the Munich Campus)

It would be hard to imagine a more exciting or unique way to begin a college experience than many of us found at the Munich Branch of the University of Maryland. The university, which had been offering accredited college level courses to off-duty military personnel for several years, agreed in the early 1950's to open a daytime branch in Munich where students could pursue their studies on a full-time basis. Most of these students were recent graduates of military (DOD) high schools from all over Europe and beyond. With thousands of our stateside contemporaries, we were sharing the excitement of leaving home for the first time and going off to college. Like others across the country, we would experience new levels of learning, new social relations, the many aspects of campus life, and a new independence.

But, for all the similarities, the Munich experience was different. We were on a military caserne in the middle of post- and cold-war Europe. Some of the oldest universities in America could look back on a 300 year history, but here we were in a city that had just celebrated its 800th anniversary with a history going back centuries before that. Our stateside peers would read about the calamities of World War II, but we were strolling among bombed out buildings and visiting one of the notorious Nazi death camps located just 13 miles away. We could go downtown and stand between the lions of the Feldherrnhalle, where Hitler had stood exhorting his troops just a few years earlier. With evacuation drills, passport control cards and parents frequently being deployed to "hot spots" around the world, history and current events seemed much more up close and personal than we could have experienced elsewhere.

Most of us had grown up as military "brats," frequently moving around the country and, indeed, the world. We were used to making new friends and quickly adapting to new surroundings. As a result, there seemed to be an easy bonding and sense of community within the student body. We were a large enough group to support many extra-curricular activities - clubs, sports, student organizations, etc -. and yet small enough that everyone could feel part of the whole without needing fraternities or sororities . We were constantly aware of the military presence - having to show ID to enter the caserne or standing at attention each day as the flag was lowered, for example - but we were also somewhat apart. The rank-based social structure of most military installations seemed to fade into the background. It didn't matter whether a student's parent was a private or a general. There was a great sense of camaraderie among the student body.

Living in the dorms, we had our share of pranks and silly antics. And with our newly found freedom and pretty liberal German liquor laws, many may have over imbibed on the local brew offerings. But because we knew that major infractions would reflect on our parents' military careers, there was very little serious misbehavior.

Munich was a wonderful place to be a student; there were so many opportunities to experience all that this great city had to offer. From the Hofbräuhaus and the Oktoberfest to Wagner and Verdi; with great museums, castles and cathedrals, we spent a great deal of time off campus. In spite of the scars of the recent war, Americans were generally liked and it was easy for us to strike up friendships in the local Gasthaus or on the ski slopes. In fact, many of us became avid skiers as we spent frequent weekends schussing through the alps of Germany, Austria, Italy and Switzerland. Because we were generally not allowed to have cars, our ski trips and other tours were done by the busload where "getting there was half the fun." Many of us formed friendships and memories that have lasted over the decades.

In addition to earning stateside college credit, we were blessed with a great faculty, many of whom were as enthused about being in Europe and in Munich as we were. The student/teacher ratio was enviable. Most classes had no more than 20 students or so. Without the "publish or perish" atmosphere of traditional universities, the faculty seemed genuinely interested in teaching. Many of them became involved in student activities, served as club sponsors, and otherwise fostered great relationships with the student community.

The campus had an active tour program offering several weekend or longer tours to such places as Vienna, Prague, Amsterdam and Berlin, as well as skiing trips to Austria, Italy and Switzerland. Munich's location in central Europe was such that you could be in any of a dozen countries in about a six hour drive. At DM 4.20 to the dollar (at least in the early years), and with Europe's typically generous student discounts, travel and entertainment were bargains even on a military family's limited budget.

With today's proliferation of college Semester Abroad programs, it is hard to realize that 50 years ago, any foreign study experience was pretty much reserved for the elite and well-to-do. The chance to live and study for a year or more in a vibrant city like Munich was a once in a lifetime opportunity.

For those of us who like to collect memories rather than things, Munich was a treasure trove never to be forgotten.

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