

A REPORT ON A SABBATICAL LEAVE

1971-1972

Ernesto B. ...

Presented to the Faculty, the Administration, and
the Board of Trustees of Mt. San Antonio College.

by
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The sabbatical leave program afforded me an excellent opportunity to enrich my knowledge and understanding of the contributions made by England, Western Europe and the Mideast to our literature and Western Civilization. This was accomplished by traveling and meeting people, as well as seeing the art treasures of the Western world. We traveled by every means available from sight-seeing boats, along the canals of Amsterdam and Venice, buses, taxis, auto ferries (at least twelve or more), and two luxury liners (one Italian and the other a Yugoslav).

This all started on July 6, 1971 in Frankfurt, Germany, when our plane touched down and we embarked on a new way of life, living in a Volkswagon Camper. We visited eighteen countries, some several times, and three continents, Europe, Africa, and Asia. My family and I not only enjoyed visiting the large cities but we were fortunate in being able to see much of the countryside, and we rubbed elbows with the natives of each community we visited. We also lived on their economy.

Holland

As we camped along the Rhine we compared the beauty of the Medieval castles which rise on both sides of the river, with the busy barge and ship traffic on this modern industrial waterway. We visited the impressive Gothic cathedral at Cologne (started in 1250 and completed in 1800). Amsterdam with its cosmopolitan flavor was of great interest. The Rijksmuseum with its superb collection of Flemish art was a good introduction to the Dutch. We continued our journey through, Leyden, The Hague, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Brussels and Ostend. From Ostend we took the car-ferry to England.

England

London was our next important stop. We saw Westminster Abbey, Parliament, St. Paul's, The Monument, the Tower of London (to view the crown jewels), and the British Museum. Here we viewed excellent exhibits on Ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome. Later we were able to visit many of the actual sights where these artifacts were discovered.

We visited ancient Stonehenge, Waltham Abbey (built by the Saxons during King Harold's reign in 1066), Windsor Castle, Lord Nelson's Victory, and the National Maritime Museum. They all proved most interesting by giving us gleams into the various periods of history. London brought back thoughts of Shaw and Dickens. And the Old Vic brought to mind the great traditions of the English Theatre. We were impressed with all we saw and we tried to see everything.

We moved freely throughout the countryside and visited Nottingham and the walled city, York. We also took in Cambridge and a walking tour of Oxford. It was indeed a thrill to see these charming old institutions that produced so many great leaders and gifted writers of the past.

Stratford on Avon was one of our cherished joys. The great master, Shakespeare, has always been one of my favorites. Therefore, it was a great privilege to finally visit Stratford. We looked in on Shakespeare's past - his manuscripts, personal effects, study, and, of course, the Anne Hathway House. The first hand information gained here can't help but be a great aid in teaching about this period in the future. We journeyed on through Wordsworth and Coleridge's Lake Country, and the green meadows that these poets loved so much.

All of England proved most interesting to me and it deserves another and a closer look in the future. The people were both delightful and cheerful and their love of dogs and flowers is second to none. Actually, they are lucky that their weather is so poor for it protects them from having 100,000,000 people living on this beautiful yet tiny island.

Ireland

We crossed into Ireland, despite the shooting, and were awed by its natural unspoiled beauty. We were fortunate in being able to see Synge's The Playboy of the Western World presented by the Abbey Players. The production was excellent. I was also able to see a fine exhibit of Synge's personal letters, notes, and manuscripts, that just happen to be on view at Trinity College in Dublin. Dublin itself proved to be an interesting study in contrast between the rich and the poor, the new and the old.

Connemara (James Joyce's country so bleak and rocky), Ulster, and Galway were other important points of interest. Unfortunately, most of the medieval castles lay in ruin throughout the countryside. A sad commentary on this poor but proud country that must rely on the land and the hostile sea for its meager survival. The Irish, like the English, were happy and friendly people, and, I might add, they seem to love Americans.

France

Our next major stop was Paris, and the weather was just about perfect. This city is a gem. It has wide boulevards with trees lining the sidewalks. Many theatres and sidewalk cafes help to create a marvelous atmosphere for all to enjoy. The intellectual interest is still there. Racine, Moliere, Voltaire, Victor Hugo, and the one and only Napoleon have all left their mark on Paris. Notre Dame Cathedral was only one of the many beautiful Gothic Churches we visited. Of course, the Eiffel Tower, Napoleon's Tomb, and the Louvre all held their special interest for us. But the Louvre, with its many art treasures, remains one of the high points in our memory. We saw the Mona Lisa, Winged Victory, Venus de Milo, the crown jewels, and many other priceless treasures. Literature and art both seem to be held in the highest esteem here.

Versailles, with its magnificent gardens and beautiful Royal Palaces, is another excellent example of the opulent past. We are most fortunate that it survived the French Revolution so it can be viewed for ages to come.

All in all, we found the French people a bit cold and distant, but language barriers might have accounted for this strained formality.

Spain

Madrid, proved to be a most fascinating city that still holds to the charm and traditions of the romantic past. The Spanish people's life style seems to be slower and much gayer than that of the Western European. They love to walk, talk, and stay up all evening. In fact, the city comes to life as darkness begins to fall. While in Madrid we searched out and found the world famous Casa Botin. It remains just as Hemingway knew and loved this favorite spot for bullfighters, travelers, artists, and writers. We dined on roast pig and drank sangria. It was a gourmet's delight and a charming evening.

The Prado was a splendidly modern art gallery with many priceless paintings of Goya and Velasquez. "Las Memimas" seemed to qualify as the number one masterpiece in this vast collection. Toledo held all of the charm of the Sixteenth Century Spain, and the Twentieth Century hasn't changed this charming city. Handcrafts, swords, and jewelry are age old trades and skills still practiced as their forefathers practiced them centuries before. Toledo has been proclaimed a national shrine and hopefully it shall remain as it is for years to come. Cervantes', Don Quixote could still be part of this romantic setting both in fact and imagination.

The Cathedral at Seville boasts the tomb of Christopher Columbus. The Royal gardens and palaces help make this a beautiful city indeed. Malaga, and the Costa Del Sol, proved to be a delightful contrast, small fishing villages and large apartment houses graced the sea shore. Cordova, with its 1,000 column Mesquita (built in the Eighth Century), and Granada with all its Moorish influence, including the grand castle (built in 1238), were certainly worth a visit. The Catholic Kings are also entombed in a nearby church in the old city square, and the University at Salamanca proved to be steeped in history, having educated many of the elite of Europe in its time. An old Roman bridge and aqueduct still stands in the old city. Much credit must be given to James Mitchener's Iberia, which proved to be an invaluable aid in giving us additional insights into the people, the countryside, history, and culture of these wonderfully proud people. Spain was a challenge and a delight for we were privileged to live among these people for some three months.

Morocco

Morocco was fascinating trip back into Biblical times. Little has changed. Life seems to go on much the same as in the time of Christ. Rabat is the Capital City, but equally fascinating were Casablanca, Fes, Meknes, and Marrakech. Donkeys and camels dominated the scene. We were delighted to be able to make purchases at their souks and bazaars. Bargaining was the accepted procedure and all this was done with a good natured smile or grin. Morocco is a land of mosaics and minarets and the natives were called to prayer several times a day.

After leaving the holy city of Fes we by chance sought out and found a magnificent Roman ruin at Volubilis surpassed by few, if any. It was an added bonus that we received while spending a most memorable three weeks among these ancient people and a culture that we shall never forget. Morocco proved to be a delightful surprise in every possible way.

Greece

We put our camper aboard the Christopher Columbus and sailed for Athens. Believe me when I say that Greece was all we expected and more. The Acropolis dominated the sacred hills above the city, and it was a beautiful sight to behold. The Archeological Museum held many marvelous bronze, marble statues, and the golden death masks, found at Mycenae (we were to later visit the actual archeological site) and Beehive tomb of the King. Apollo, the athletic, and Zeus were imposing pieces of art. We also visited Delphi, the temple of Apollo, the temple of Athena, the temple of Poseidon, and a well preserved theatre at Epidaurus. All of these ancient wonders were well known to me because of my studies in World Literature.

However, to see the actual settings, art, and ruins that Homer and Sophocles wrote about, was beyond belief. Greece held a high place in our agenda and will always remain in our thoughts and memories. We found these people to be generous and delightful. They worked hard, and are still unspoiled by European ways. They too seem to like Americans.

Turkey

Turkey was another pleasant side trip. We traveled down to the ancient city of Troy. It was a sobering sight to see what had been the guardian to the Eastern trade routes, now but a massive of rubble, not a stone was left standing. Thus a complete civilization was destroyed, never to rise again. Istanbul, with its Blue Mosque, Topkapi, and many minarets was a delightful city, and the people proved to be both helpful and friendly. St. Sophia, with its mosaics, dated back to the Sixth Century. But it was Topkapi, with its magnificent treasures covering a span of a thousand years or more, that proved to be the highlight of this fascinating journey. We saw the power and grandeur of the sheiks of old. Turkey, like Morocco, was a complete change of pace - the east as apposed to the western style of doing things. Their way may be different, yet their way has a certain style and charm all of its own.

Germany

The Rhine River, famous for the many castles along its banks, seemed to be a timeless wonderland. Barges and industry, rather than defending armies are the main stay of this famous waterway. (Frankfurt and the University of Leipzig was a gentle reminder of Goethe, Schiller, and Wagner.) Munich had its famous clock tower in the main square of the old city and the Oktober-Fest was a festive added attraction. We were able to see the citizens

and visitors from all over the world, celebrate with traditional drinking songs and folk dancing - all done in their native costumes. The natural beauty and solitude of the Black Forest, with woodcarvers making nutcrackers, dolls, and soldiers, brought us back several hundred years in time. As did Heidelberg, with its delightful fairyland castles gracing the mountainside. It reminded us of the many fairy tales that originated in this very area. Bavaria was a place of special enchantment and charm all of its own, and the people seemed to be happy, homey folks that love the land, flowers, and the natural beauty that surround them.

Austria

Austria was much like Southern Germany. Both Innsbruck and Salzburg were charming old cities, both artistically and in natural scenic beauty. But it was Vienna that proved to be a true jewel steeped in past glory, tradition, and culture. The Opera House, Museums, and Art Galleries were all splendid. The Military Armory Museum was living history dating back to the rise of the Habsburgs up to the present. Vienna is proud of its past and holds on to its many cultural achievements with great pride. The splendor of the past still lives in Vienna as typified by Strauss and "The Vienna Waltz". And the Danube (not so blue) still rolls on to connect the past, with the present, and the future. These charming people seem to enjoy life and have a great zest for living.

Italy

Milan was our first stop after a pleasant sojourn in Switzerland. In the main square of the old city, a huge Gothic Cathedral dominates the surroundings. This huge structure is under repair, as are many other famous structures ravaged by war. But it was Leonard Da Vinci's "The Last Supper" that actually brought us to this dingy industrial city. Though old, and in need of repair, this magnificent painting is awe inspiring. It is a must on anyone's agenda.

We moved on to see the fine mosaics and the Leaning Tower of Pisa. So much has been written about this strange wonder I shall not dwell on Pisa, suffice it to say that it was well worth the trip. Then on to the beautiful Renaissance city of Florence. We stayed seven days and we could have easily spent seventy. Everywhere there seemed to be grand artistic achievements. Michelangelo's works dominated and set the theme throughout the city - in buildings as well as sculpture. The Renaissance Cathedral and the Baptistery were beautiful and well preserved. The mosaic in the Baptistery, of God and Last Judgement, was overpowering. And the beautiful bronze doors by Ghiberti is one artist's contribution to all mankind, to look on to and ponder the powers of creation and creative genius. What can I say? Ghiberti's doors were more than inspiring, they were breath taking.

But it was Michelangelo's tomb of the Medici and the powerful figure of David that stands forth as the greatest achievement in this city of rich artistic splendor in art, beauty, and culture. This lovely city seems to be a living monument to the genius of Michelangelo and the greatness of the golden age of Florence.

Venice was charming, with its canals, St. Mark's Square, and St. Mark's Cathedral. It is a beautiful wonderland that seems to be losing its battle

with the encroaching sea. San Marino was a lovely mountain top principality unscarred by war or time. And Assisi (like Avila in Spain) is a beautiful preserved medieval walled city, also unchanged by time. St. Francis of Assisi is entombed below the main altar of this most unusual church.

It is necessary to speak of Rome last, because this city is the heart beat of Italy just as it was in Dante's time and Vergil's before him. The Colosseum is a must, as is the Emperor's Forum, and the Capitoline Hill, with its buildings designed by Michelangelo as a setting for the bronze figure of Marcus Aurelius mounted on a horse. Every church and every square seem to hold its own art treasures that links it to the past. Several examples are the dungeon, where Peter and Paul were chained and held captive, and the church that now ~~holds~~ Moses (another of Michelangelo's greatest achievements) holding the Ten Commandments in his hand and us with his powerful eyes. What power! What strength!

The Vatican with its numerous art treasures and the magnificent Sistine Chapel. It is impossible to describe the overwhelming effect all this grandeur has on the humble beholder. And last but not least, we visited St. Peter's, after having an audience with the Pope (public not private). Once again St. Peter's Cathedral was so inspiring it is impossible to imagine. You must see it to believe it. And, of course, the lovely Pieta (which was damaged badly several weeks later) so beautiful, and tender.

We left Rome, with regret, for Genoa to catch our ship that would bring us back to America and reality.

As our ship docked in Boston, we compared ourselves with the immigrants of the years past. There is surely some validity in this because we were seeing our country in a new perspective. The year that we had spent away from what was familiar and comfortable had sharpened our perceptions.

As we moved homeward across the continent, we visited places of educational, historic, and scenic interest. New England, including Boston, Cape Cod, Provincetown, Plymouth, Lexington, Concord, the Mohawk Trail across Massachusetts and the smaller states of Connecticut and Rhode Island brought us face to face with colonial history. From the frenetic megapolis of New York to the wide boulevards of Washington, D.C., the pathos of the National Cemetery at Arlington, the somnolent Civil War Battlefields of Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania to the thunder of Niagra Falls, we discovered America.

This was the experience, and the opportunity of a lifetime. The invaluable experiences, insights and adventures will not be forgotten. As a person, I have grown and as a teacher I am better prepared to share with my students new found knowledge and wisdom.

I wish to thank the Board of Trustees for implementing the sabbatical program.