

Richard R. Bier

Richard Bier's interest in the world beyond America may have started at the age of eight with a simple Christmas gift, a globe. He remembers spending many hours looking at it, memorizing capitals, figuring out what time it was in Asia or Australia, wondering what life was like in places with such strange sounding names—the Gold Coast, Siam, French Guiana, Tanganyika—all seeming to be far more than a world away from Janesville, Wisconsin. That same globe sits in his office today, a reminder that his life, like that globe, has changed.

That is not to say that the outside world was not noticed. After all, all of his grandparents were immigrants, from Austria and Ireland. He remembers being fascinated hearing his grandfather speak German with his great uncles and aunts (there were 10 of them!). But, aside from that, not much of the world was visible in his Midwest. He attended parochial school. There were two in Janesville, St. Mary's for the Germans, St. Patrick's for the Irish. The school was "parochial" in the provincial sense, too. There was little, if any, attention paid to the world outside Wisconsin. He is quite sure that he had one more globe than the school did.

To a lot of Catholic boys in the fifties the priesthood was appealing. High school seminaries were packed all over the United States. From just his eighth-grade class, two went off to the south side of Milwaukee, to St. Francis. This was not a typical American high school: the curriculum included four years of Latin, a year of ancient Greek, and three years of a modern foreign language, but no chemistry, biology, shop, or typing. Only one elective was allowed: for sophomores the choice was German, Polish, or social studies! But world history was important, perhaps with a slant. The textbook, which he still has, had St. Francis Xavier and Notre Dame Cathedral on the cover. Anything connected to the world Dick found interesting. He was hungry for news of the outside.

Then five years of seminary life ended. At the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, he majored in classics: languages, even so-called "dead" ones, interested him. But his life changed when he was looking for a part-time job. The campus was a training center for the Peace Corps. A job as a language lab technician brought together his interest in languages and the world, an interest that continues to the present. The day he was accepted by the Peace Corps was an exciting one for him, but even more so for his mother, the person who had given him the globe. She had literally been out of southern Wisconsin for only a few days in her life, and now her son was off to see the world.

After language and culture training at Princeton, Dick left for Turkey. The next two years were spent out on the Anatolian plateau in Karabuk, a small steel-producing city between Ankara and the Black Sea. He taught English as a foreign language to junior and senior high school students. But the real education was his. He traveled to all areas of Turkey, including a summer of teaching at Ataturk University in eastern Turkey in the shadow of Mount Ararat. There were trips to Israel, Greece, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, known as Trans-Jordan on his globe. Those years, 1965–1967, were in a sense the beginning of the rest of his life. Teaching English would occupy most of the next 40 years.

Two of those years when it did not were 1967 to 1969. His draft board in Rock County, Wisconsin, was calling. Peace Corps service did not preclude military service. Within four months of leaving Turkey, he found himself in a military police uniform, and, within one year, he was in Vietnam, Indo-China on his globe. He managed to talk his way into customs duty at Tan Son Nhut airport near Saigon, a relatively safe job for Saigon in 1968. No cross-cultural learning in those years. Without question, the best day in 1968 was June 15, when he married Gloria Jensen of Racine, Wisconsin.

The memories of the wonderful, fulfilling years in Turkey had not faded. He had enjoyed teaching immensely. So in the fall of 1969 Gloria and Dick left for Bloomington,

Indiana. He entered the graduate applied linguistics program at Indiana University. After a year as an associate instructor, he was invited to join the faculty of the program, then known as Urban and Overseas English Programs, subsequently as TESOL and Applied Linguistics, as a visiting lecturer and later as lecturer. He became the director of the English Language Improvement Program, a post which he will relinquish upon retirement.

The years on the faculty included teaching graduate and undergraduate courses to thousands of students, the vast majority international. Other teaching included stints with the Arabian Gulf English Skills Program, the Saudi Arabian Program, and the Summer Orientation Program sponsored by the Institute of International Education. Nineteen eighty-seven took the Biers (Gloria and children Rich, Beth, and Mary) to Malaysia, where Dick taught as part of the IU-Malaysian universities cooperative program, best known by its acronym, MUCIA. That was a terrific year in which Gloria and the kids had their first chance to understand another culture up close and for an extended period. More travel ensued, including Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Australia.

As retirement beckons, Dick remembers his colleagues and co-workers: Edna Ballinger, Eleanor Sebeok, and Edith Hanania, all now deceased. Staff members Karla Reynolds, Nancy Quinn, Janet Long, and Elizabeth Huttle have provided such valuable assistance. Long-standing colleagues, Professors Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig and Bill Johnston, continue in the Department of Second Language Studies, the most recent name of the department. He appreciates their friendship for so many years. Colleagues from the Intensive English Program include Linda Abe and Beverly Rolfs. Finally, his beloved colleagues and friends, Professors Emeriti Harry Gradman and Beverly Hartford, Dr. Susan Greer, and Mr. Marlin Howard, have made his years at IU productive, fun, and never-to-be-forgotten.

Dick and Gloria will remain in Bloomington. But they expect to explore a few more of those places on that globe.