

Winter 2013

# I remember - Memories of an academic neophyte

June J. Pilcher

*Clemson University*, [jpilche@clemson.edu](mailto:jpilche@clemson.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/psych\\_pubs](https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/psych_pubs)



Part of the [Psychiatry and Psychology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Pilcher, June J., "I remember - Memories of an academic neophyte" (2013). *Publications*. 2.  
[https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/psych\\_pubs/2](https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/psych_pubs/2)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Psychology at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications by an authorized administrator of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact [kokeefe@clemson.edu](mailto:kokeefe@clemson.edu).

# I remember



Memories of an academic neophyte 

By June J. Pilcher, Ph.D.  
Fulbright-Freud Scholar,  
2011-2012

*This past year, Alumni Distinguished Professor of Psychology June Pilcher spent six months in Austria as a Fulbright-Freud Scholar, researching, teaching, training and traveling. It was a marvelous experience for her, and one that she pursued in part because of another Fulbright award almost 30 years ago. Clemson World asked her to share her reflections.*

I remember opening the small packet from the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (German Academic Exchange Service) with a letter dated 1<sup>st</sup> March 1984 that began with, “We are pleased to inform you...” That was about as far as I read, at least in those first few minutes. I went back to my apartment, sat in an old rocker, and listened to “The Grand Illusion” by Styx, thinking that this whole thing could be a mistake, an illusion.

I had worked hard for seven years to finish my undergraduate degree; I enlisted in the Navy to support myself, and then I worked full time in an emergency room during my last two years as an undergraduate. Was I really fortunate enough to be going to Freiburg and then Munich, Germany, for a year on a PAID scholarship just to be a student?

## A different world

I applied for the Fulbright student award in the fall of 1983, my last year at the University of Southern Mississippi. My knowledge of academic grants and awards was nonexistent; I didn’t even know what a Fulbright was. I was what Clemson calls a FIRST. **My father finished sixth grade, but he was big enough to work the family farm so he didn’t return to school. My mother finished eighth grade but then had to go to work as a live-in housekeeper. I am a first-generation**



**college graduate and a first-generation (in fact, only) Ph.D. in my family.** The only reason I knew about the Fulbright was because my German professor, Dr. William Odom, told me I should apply for it. I wonder if he ever knew what a turning point getting that Fulbright award became in my life.

I remember that year in Europe. In Freiburg, I took an immersion course in German at the Goethe Institute, then moved to Munich and lived in student housing at the Olympic Village (from the 1972 Olympics). At the Max Planck Institute for Psychiatry, I worked on projects on sleep and biological rhythms and was fortunate to establish a long-term relationship with Dr. Hartmut Schulz. He was generous with his time and advice and helped me begin my scientific career. I sat in on undergraduate and graduate classes at the University of Munich and tried to understand as much as I could. And, of course, I traveled. I experienced life in Europe, and I loved it!

## A continuing illusion

I remember the feeling of an illusion even after my Fulbright year. It was only after completing my Ph.D. at the University of Chicago and starting to work in academia that the feeling slowly faded. I gradually became more comfortable in my academic surroundings. **And I became ever more devoted to helping students, much as my professors had helped me – a total greenhorn to the academic world – understand what it takes to succeed.**

Before long, I realized that I wanted to become a Fulbright Scholar, to travel again to Europe, but this time to work with international students and offer them the chance to work with a professor from a different culture and scientific background.

It wasn’t until the spring and summer of 2010 that I didn’t have research funding that precluded a prolonged trip. I made the decision in a flash — I would apply for a sabbatical and for a Fulbright Scholar award. This time, being a little more aware of academic grants and awards, I knew that it would be competitive. I applied to work in the Social, Cognitive, Affective, Neuroscience Unit (SCAN) and teach at the University of Vienna. But instead of being awarded a Fulbright to work exclusively at the university, I received the Fulbright-Freud Scholar Award, which allowed me to work at the university and the Sigmund Freud Museum.



## International collaboration

My experience as a Fulbright Scholar is something I will always remember. I lived in Vienna for about six months. I taught a seminar on human brain and behavior (in English) to about 40 students where we read and discussed a science-based popular press book and scientific articles. Our classes were oriented around presentations, discussions and projects. The students gave their presentations and contributed to discussions in English. And much like my students at Clemson, they were concerned about the amount of work needed to complete the course, but they did the work and did a great job! I was impressed with their effort, and I truly loved getting to know them and watching them learn.

**I also started several research projects while in Vienna that are ongoing, so my Creative Inquiry and graduate students at Clemson also benefit by working on research projects with an international team.** Maybe some of them will decide to go to Vienna in the future to experience Europe and the opportunity to collaborate with an international research team.

## Paying it forward

A Fulbright in Vienna was even more attractive to me since the headquarters of my traditional martial art group, Karatedo Doshinkan, is located there, as well as the home of our grand master, Hanshi 10.Dan Nobuo Ichikawa. I have been training in and teaching Doshinkan for more than 25 years and have frequently visited Vienna for a week or two in the summer to train. Getting the Fulbright allowed me to train with our grand master for more than six months.

The Fulbright award gave me a fantastic opportunity to give back in so many ways. I could give back to the international students and research collaborators as a way to help “pay forward” for the opportunity I had as a student in Munich. I could also give back to my martial art group by contributing to the training, the positive atmosphere and the growing knowledge base of our martial art.

It was a memorable six months in Vienna. I traveled around Europe for research presentations and to train with some of the dojos in my martial art group. In Vienna, I listened to horse carriages pass below my apartment windows on their way home in the evenings, watched the 400-plus varieties of roses bloom in the Volksgarten, attended the Summer Night Concert by the Vienna Philharmonic at Schoenbrunn Palace, and experienced the 4<sup>th</sup> of July reception (with fireworks) at the American ambassador’s residence.

I expected my time in Vienna to be productive and a fantastic experience. **What surprises me is how much of it I am bringing back to Clemson with me.** I feel a renewed desire to help students succeed, to watch them learn and admire their effort, to better see their college education from their perspective, to remember that they are here to learn in the classroom and in research but to also learn outside of the classroom, much like I did on my Fulbright adventures. 😊