

Eastern Europe, Asia Become Teaching Lawyer's Classrooms



By Ed Adams

What's it like teaching law in Siberia, the Czech Republic and Hungary?

It was the experience of a lawyer's lifetime.

The Center for International Legal Studies (CILS) in Salzburg, Austria, made it possible through its Senior Lawyers Program, now in its fourth year. Forty-some attorneys from small and large firms across America participated in our 2007 orientation. In 2009 the CILS program is placing 85 lawyers.

The orientation is an annual, week-long program at CILS' two adjacent buildings within easy walking distance of old Salzburg. One building is a small hotel, the other the former Bishop's palace. The purpose of the orientation is to provide a primer on teaching law in Eastern Europe. The goal of the program, as designed by CILS Director Dennis Campbell, is to convey an understanding of the rule of law in countries that have engaged it in recent decades with varying degrees of success. Professor Campbell calls the program participants "Ambassadors" for the U.S.

The letter containing our first assignment, in 2007, gave my wife, Cindy, and me a chill. The assignment was to Novosibirsk State University in Russia. We scrambled to our atlas, curious whether the "sibirsk" in Novosibirsk meant Siberia. It did. We decided, if the university was willing, to go directly from our orientation in Salzburg to Novosibirsk, even though it was still wintertime in Siberia.

The university location, called Akademgorodok, is a four-hour airplane

flight east of Moscow, on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. The Soviet Union planted the university there in the 1950s and assembled an all-star cast of scientists to compete in cold-war technology with the United States. What's it like in Siberia in March? It is zero to 20 degrees Fahrenheit, but a very dry cold. Two feet of snow blanketed the ground. The sun shone beautifully every day. We walked the 20 minutes from our apartment to the law building through a forest of pine and birch on plowed and well-pounded paths of snow.

I taught more than 20 law and finance students, the best and the brightest of Siberia. They spoke English well and engaged with enthusiasm in my two-week, 12-class hour course: Chapter 11 Bankruptcy in the United States. I introduced them to the Socratic method and even distributed problems in English, not unlike American law school exam problems, for them to discuss among themselves and report on during class. They tackled the Delta Airlines problem and concluded that Delta should be allowed to cut costs by rejecting its pilots' contract, but that the judge should signal

that Delta's proposed wage cuts were too steep. Not bad for students 11 time zones from Cincinnati. My reward from the students on the last day of class was a university T-shirt.

The food at the on-campus supermarket and restaurants was both tasty and plentiful. Our favorite dinner out was at Zilly Billy, whose themed décor was old-time rustic Siberia, when people looked just like Alaskan Eskimos and lived in dwellings resembling wigwams.

As top-notch as the students and food were, the living quarters were typical of the high-rise tenements the Soviet Union constructed *en mass* in the 1950s and 1960s. OSHA would board up the doors. In the city of Novosibirsk, 20 kilometers away, a massive statue of Lenin still dominated the town square. Our host explained that it cost too much to tear down.

Assignment No. 2, in 2008, was to Masaryk University Law School in Brno,



Adams with some of his Budapest students. The students were from Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Lithuania, Germany and France.

the Czech Republic, to teach a 12-hour Comparison of the Business Bankruptcy Laws of the United States and the Czech Republic. Again, the students needed no translator. Some of the best and the brightest in their country, they energetically engaged the subject and wrote uniformly thoughtful essays in English for their class grades.

Brno was a big step up from Novosibirsk. The university housed us in a nice hotel a 15 minute walk from the law building, which had been a Gestapo headquarters in World War II. The university gave me an MU tie at the end of the course.

The two-week stint gave us ample time to tour Brno and even drive on one weekend to Bratislava and on another to visit my cousins on my mother's side. While touring Brno, we stood in a line at

a church, which I insisted over my wife's objections was the line to see the mummified monks in the church crypt. When the church members started passing out sandwiches, I had to concede to Cindy that this was a breadline, not the way to the mummies.

Assignment No. 3, this April, was yet another step up, to Eötvös Lorand University Law School in Budapest, Hungary. A step up because of the great city that Budapest is. The law school is no Johnny-come-lately. It was founded in 1667. After having more than 20 students in each of Novosibirsk and Brno, we had 13 in Budapest but the group was Pan-European. Only six were from Hungary. The others were from Germany, Austria, Poland, Slovenia, France and Lithuania. They were brought to Budapest through the Erasmus Program, a coalition of some 30 European universities that provides exchange opportunities for top-notch students.

The law school required 24 teaching hours, which meant three weeks in Budapest. The April time frame coincided with the General Motors negotiations with the UAW, the federal government

and its bondholders, giving a great opportunity to teach by example.

The course was a Comparison of the Business Bankruptcy Laws of the United States, the Czech Republic and Hungary. We were able to contrast how GM could (or could not) in those three jurisdictions take steps like modifying or rejecting its union contract and retiree health benefits, converting its bondholder debt to stock and selling its Opel division in Europe. The GM subject became one of the students' two choices for their

end-of-the course essay in English. I emerged into the 20th century, using PowerPoint for the first time.


The university gave us a small efficiency apartment in Central Pest on a tree-lined square much like Piatt Park in Downtown Cincinnati and within easy walking

distance of the Opera, the underground and numerous restaurants. It featured a washing machine that took 90 minutes for its countless cycles.

Suffice to say, Budapest is a world-class city, one we'd hoped to revisit since we stopped there to thaw out on our way home from Siberia in 2007. We squeezed in a dinner cruise on the Danube, visits to the Castle District in Buda, a view of the crown jewels in the Parliament, an evening at the opera for *Rigoletto*, a morning in the Gellert thermal baths, a day in the charming old upstream village of Szentendre and even a weekend high-speed train trip to Vienna.

One of the biggest challenges in Hungary is the language. The Magyars, a totally different tribe than the Indo-Europeans who populated a lot of Western Europe, brought a consonant-dominated tongue from Eastern Asia that bears no resemblance to English, German or any of the Latin languages. Its only related languages are spoken in Estonia and Finland, but Hungarians say they can't understand the Finns. I discovered the peril of getting a haircut from a lady barber with whom I would not commu-

nicate. She gave me "white sidewalls" like I hadn't had since the Army. Some words, though, are essential, like "Ferfi" and "Noi," the words on restroom doors.

These are great experiences from the teaching to the living and touring. How else could you teach great law students from Europe and Asia and see Siberian co-eds eating ice cream cones outside in 10 degree weather, stand in a breadline to view mummified monks or learn Hungarian words for "men" and "women"? 



Adams, dressed for the Russian winter, visits a shopping center.

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Need help sorting out an ethical quandary? The members of the CBA Ethics & Professional Responsibility Committee listed below stand ready to help you interpret your obligations under the Ohio Rules of Professional Conduct. Please note that questions posed should be framed hypothetically and should relate to your own prospective conduct. The committee also accepts requests for written opinions.

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