

Fall 2008

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Center for International Education

Fall 2008

THE ULTIMATE 'HOMECOMING': IA'S HURLBURT REPORTS FROM ABROAD

by **Scott Hurlburt '88**

Scott Hurlburt, was one of the earliest participants in the International Affairs (IA) program, graduating in 1988 with a dual major in IA and Business Administration. An assistant vice president for Swiss Reinsurance Company, Scott is currently on assignment in Switzerland. He and his family will return to their permanent residence in Orange, Connecticut, in the near future.

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Hurlburt and his family recently visited Granada, Spain, where Scott studied during spring semester 1987.

When I graduated from UNH with a dual major in Business Administration and International Affairs, the IA program was still in its infancy. I had no idea then what an impact my participation in the program or my semester abroad in Granada, Spain, would eventually have on my life.

My first job after college was at a leading Fidelity and Surety bonding company. It was an excellent fit for my business major. Its only drawback was that it was a domestic company with no foreign operations.

In 2002, I joined the Credit & Surety division of Swiss Re, one of the largest global reinsurance companies, with offices in over twenty-five countries and on six continents. My UNH degree and prior work experience took on a new relevance. Early last year, the global opportunities at Swiss Re became reality for me. I found myself with an

offer for a two-year international assignment at our Zurich headquarters. After family discussions with my wife and our three daughters (ages 11, 7 and 4), we took a collective leap at the chance!

We've been in Zurich just over a year now. Freed from the constraints of yard work and home improvements, and plunked down in central Europe, what else can we do but maintain a frenetic travel schedule? We seem to be clocking a memory a minute! We've also embraced most of the "ins" and "outs" of Swiss life. We've figured out when, where, and how to recycle; learned not to cut the grass on Sundays (still considered a day of rest here); and have maneuvered into parking spaces better suited for golf carts than automobiles

At the office, I've also gained valuable insight into some key differences in how Americans and Swiss conduct business. As Americans, we're bold, outspoken and natural risk-takers. We tend to see meetings as a huge inconvenience and prefer to cut through red tape and move things ahead quickly, often individually. We're the ultimate entrepreneurs, creating an endless flow of new products and services, but also expending significant time and resources recovering from our mistakes.

The Swiss approach business a bit differently. While direct in their speech, they're non-confrontational and very risk adverse. They require complete transparency and believe in making decisions only after all the facts are known; they invented process. To the Swiss, meetings are not an imposition, but an opportunity to gather information, share views and build consensus. Some could argue that they miss big opportunities as a result of their process-orientation; others might contend that they avoid unnecessary failure thanks to their thoughtful due diligence. Regardless of the merits of either view, I am finding this a tremendous learning experience that will continue to pay dividends for me, both professionally and personally.

On a more personal level, I consider this chance to live and work abroad a "homecoming" for me. First, it's brought me back to my IA roots, and I'm thrilled to be off of the IA "missing persons" list. Second, and coincidentally, while UNH was celebrating Homecoming 2007, I was celebrating homecoming by returning to Granada. My family and I enjoyed visiting the Alhambra and the University of Granada, where my classes were held back in 1987; but clearly, the highlight of our trip was a memorable and emotional reunion with my host family of twenty years ago. We shared three amazing days with them, reminiscing, laughing, and enjoying la vida Andaluza -- a way of life I had come to know and love. Finally, this experience has deepened my own self-awareness, has drawn my family closer, and has given us a taste of many other distinct European cultures.

Any regrets? While there's the occasional complaint from my daughters that they don't sell Pepperidge Farm Goldfish or Twizzlers in Switzerland, or from my wife that there's nothing even remotely resembling a Target Store, we all agree: our life in Switzerland and the chance to see Europe from all angles is an opportunity which didn't come soon enough, and will end far too quickly.

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