

“What?! But I’m supposed to be on a plane to Indiana, not Illinois!”

Yes, that actually happened during my month-long transition to Italy. My husband had already flown ahead to find a house; with two kids under the age of four and two dogs, it sounded like a good idea at the time. In retrospect, I should have seen it coming. And it all began with my husband, already in Italy, trying to be helpful by buying me a ticket to Indiana to complete my doctoral residency. The plan was to drop the kids off at Grandma’s in Ohio before heading to Indiana. With all the emotions running through me at that time, I didn’t catch the subtle difference on the ticket that read, “Bloomington, IL” instead of “Bloomington, IN”. Needless to say, I didn’t realize it until already on the plane. Although by that point, you don’t want to look like a dork and speak up while the propellers are running. Thankfully, I was able to make my 6:00pm check-in time despite landing in rural Illinois in the middle of a tornado warning. But looking back during this time, I can say that this period of time was the beginning of a huge change in attitude and perception.

Living through a PCS move was actually very common for me because I grew up a military brat. Every three years my family would move. The packers, playing hide and seek among the boxes in the

house, the moving truck coming, living in a hotel, mom grumpy ... it was a great time as a kid. I thought it only natural that an overseas PCS as a military spouse with kids would be a breeze, or at least I thought I was flexible enough to handle any situation that came along.

And so the moment had come to test my flexibility. After the Indiana incident (“Thank goodness it wasn’t a ticket to Iraq!” my father



Trish McDonald and family

laughed), I picked up the kids from grandma’s and flew back to North Carolina to get ready to pack up the house. I would like to think nobody realizes how much “stuff” they have, or those secret messes that show up that you didn’t know about, like cleaning out the grill. Wasn’t that hubby’s job after grilling? Well, not that day. And paint! I didn’t realize how much paint we had gone through in two years! Obviously, the half gallon cans had to be taken to be disposed properly. Not a problem if you consider waiting in line for an hour with two children, no AC in

the car in the middle of July, only to be told you are at the wrong dumping point.

Amazingly enough, the house was packed and so attention turned to the car. Unfortunately, there are only a few places in which to ship your car across the wide ocean blue, and for us it was four hours away to Virginia Beach, VA. Seeing I had to move six pieces of luggage, two kids, and two dogs with cages I decided to ask mom to come down to help. What I wasn’t expecting was mom’s love for ice cream and her lack of hustle, not

to mention a total breakdown from the kids in the women’s room during a pit stop. Imagine a mom with a screaming kid, trying to dry hands under the air dryer, little legs sticking straight out pushing against the wall to avoid the hard blowing air, while the other little one is on the ground (yuck!) singing songs and playing in some toilet paper. Thankfully, we were able to pull it together and make it to the port with five minutes to spare before closing on a Friday. And thank you to the man who took the car despite it having too much gas in it — another detail to which I forget to pay attention!

After dropping off the car we were ready for our flight to Italy. The final task was to get the dogs on the plane the evening before we were to leave, which was Sunday. I didn’t realize how complicated it can be to coordinate moving animals with your own flight during the summer time but amazingly enough I was able to make it work.

I drove the dogs to BWI cargo (just sounds terrible, doesn't it?) where I left my beloved friends, who barked the entire time until I left. (Fortunately, they made it to Italy OK, only after getting "lost" in Paris for a couple of days because the customer service person forgot to put them on the manifest!)

We departed the next day without a hitch and the kids were great! My euphoria was short lived as soon as we landed, for the culture shock set in immediately. From the abnormal quiet passport check lines, to not knowing I needed 1 euro (or quarter) to get a cart for my luggage. As always with my experience, asking for help is usually granted by someone who gives me those "Oh, you poor thing" look.

We finally met up with my husband, who took us to the house (a private rental) we were going to live in for the next four years. Beautiful! But I couldn't appreciate it immediately as I quickly learned Europe was experience the hottest summer in decades and the house had no AC or screens on windows, something I came to find out was very common.

Despite all the obstacles that came our way that month, the overall experience was invaluable. From



Trish McDonald and her daughters enjoying the European lifestyle and scenery. Photo courtesy Trish McDonald

learning that a sense of humor is essential, if not vital to the well-being of all in the family, to believing that the challenges you face not only expand your perception of the world but exposes and challenges your character in ways you've never experienced. So for those spouses about to PCS overseas, I say embrace the adventure! Learn the language and customs ~ don't be so self-conscious of making mistakes. Most people embrace your attempt to assimilate into the culture. Understand that things will be different, and that complaining about those differences and why things should be like the US will prohibit you from truly appreciating living in

another country (and maybe appreciate our own a little more). And be a risk taker. Sure, you can always go to the U.S. military base for security, but venturing out on your own, albeit in a smart manner, will expose you to things you cannot possible experience while on a MWR tour. Don't believe me? I encourage and dare you to try!

Trish McDonald is an adjunct professor for the University of Phoenix. She is a proud Army brat, Army spouse, and former Army Reservist, and recently endured another overseas PCS to Germany, where she currently lives with her husband, children, dogs, and cats. ●

Directory Information

New this year to the *PCS-TDY Europe Guide by AmeriForce Publishing* is the absence of a printed directory. Installation office telephone numbers can and do change at a rapid pace, and an annual issue cannot keep up with such changes. Instead, you can do what we do and use the DoD's Military Homefront site, which offers an extensive look at services on all installations in an easy-to-use format at www.militaryinstallations.dod.mil. Doing this also leaves more room for helpful information in our issue, instead of taking up pages with the installation directory. With phone numbers (and base closings) subject to change at any time, visiting this site is your best bet for tracking down the most up-to-date contact info.