



The Buzz

Not your Corporate Media

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On cable channel 1301,
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The Old School

Rockland

Coming to America By Philip C. Groce

I had the opportunity to interview Robert in a vacant room at the motel where he works for the summer. Born in Romania, he says that he grew up with the 'American Dream' to come to America. The problem is that the dream based itself only on American movies, especially "Home Alone." Never talked to an American.

"So, one of the things I did when I worked here last year was go to New York. I saw lots of people selling their things on the street and trying to scam me. I saw rats, and even people literally living on the street. It was a shock to me. Indeed, New York is fabulous and impresses you at first sight, but once you get to explore it on feet, you face these things."

After earning a bachelor's degree in environmental engineering in his country and starting a graduate program, he figured his only chance to come here was through a summer work program.

"It cost me \$3000 dollars to enter the program through an agency in Romania which also works with a sponsor agency in the U.S. The travel money comes through the agency in Romania, and the agency in the U.S. sets up summer work, provides health insurance, and some direction. I had other expenses such as a work permit and visa. I had to borrow the money from a bank.

"Romania is a poor country," he said, "billions in debt, mostly dirt roads. In my hometown of 1500, only about 50 automobiles there. Lots of horses and wagons. The capital, Bucharest, is not a good place to live. It has a bad reputation for corruption. The government steals from the people."

"You're the indigenous people of your country," I said. "You go back thousands of years."

"We have Austro-Hungarians since the Hapsburg Empire and Muslims left over after the Ottoman Empire. They have their traditions, and if you travel around the country, on these dirt roads, and you come to an Austro-Hungarian community in the western part of the country, they expect you to speak Hungarian."

On this trip over, he found himself at the Portland Jetport and nobody to pick him up. "Wish you good luck," was the reply when he called.

"It was my own fault," he said. "I should have made plans."

"After I got here, I had culture shock. It lasted about a month. I wanted to go home. All of the students feel it, but I say to myself that this is the road I choose for this summer. I'm not a kid anymore."

"Your expectations not realized?" I asked.

"I found out that people can smile to your face, but stab you in the back," He adjusted his tall, thin frame in the chair, then threw back his head and produced his wide appealing smile. "But I managed, eventually. Bad things will happen. For instance, I have heard, students working in hotels in housekeeping have their tip

money stolen before they can make up the rooms."

"How about your work?" I asked.

"They allow me to work a total of 70 hours a week between two places, the other is at a supermarket. Less stress there. Nice people. Ride my bike to there. Since this is my second year here, I make a little better than minimum wage. But I got depressed. It is only work, work, work. No one really cares about anything else."

"Do you pay to live here?"

"We do not pay very much, and we can have motel breakfast for free, and my younger brother, who is also a student in this program, can bring home extra food left over from the restaurant where he works. That's supper." Obviously, he had no extra fat aboard.

"I feel like a common worker. Mostly the same with the other students. There are about 50 in the area, mostly working for minimum wage. But I have no place here—no one seems to really care about me. But I have friends at a club that I clean. Most of them are old and they treat me like their own grandchild. That is very nice. Maine is an old-peoples' state."

"Haven't you made younger friends?"

"I have met young people here, too, but they spend their time smoking, drinking, doing nothing to improve themselves, or even have a dream. They have not seen how people live outside this fenced-in area they live in. They want to stay in their comfort zone.

"I used to be shy. After what I have been through, I have confidence that I can do what I want. I am now strong and tough. Plus, I have learned English. Now I have the confidence that I can get almost any job I want. I can tell employers back in Romania that they need me, rather than the other way around. I won't have my boots stuck in the mud like before. I know that I can easily make friends.

"I want to have enough money to have my own apartment—with no one else living with me. Then I will find work. I can't find environmental engineering work, except with the government, but I found out you need connections to do that. Now I want to be a flight attendant in the airlines. I'm the right age for that—25. My parents say to me that the more you learn, the more you earn. Don't be like us. Do something better. I see that I have God, my parents, and me. That's it."

"Do you have any advice for others coming to America to work?"

"I tell anyone: Don't have expectations. If you do, you will be hurt."

"But you have learned a lot," I said, "and seen a lot, earned money, learned English, found yourself, even if you have had to deal with difficult and uncaring people at times."

"I came corn, and now, after all this, I am popcorn. For that, I thank America."

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Storm aftermath in Rockland, photos by David Long

The Pole Dancers by McCabe Coolidge

The two of them have different steps and body swirls. Wayne, standing upright, walks purposely around the pole that is entangled with a microphone line. Mark moves lower down, working from his hips, circles the pole rather than walk the microphone line out of its tangle.

Greensboro where I am living at this moment has a new addition to its cultural life. 'Descending Angels.' Focused for women who want to strengthen their bodies, have some fun doing something they would never have thought about doing: pole dancing. Learning the curves and steps to going up and down the pole, balancing weight and strength.

'Angels' attracts my attention. These angels, neither luminous nor light are attracted to the title-descending, earthbound, grounded as well as 'flying.' I admit I like the location of this dance studio. Across an alley from the historic West Market Methodist Church.

Mark and Wayne perform their dance around the pole at the Federated Church in Thomaston on Tuesday nights. You can also watch Mark on Monday nights lightly leaping out of his chair and gracefully unwinding the electrical line from the pole and then positioning the microphone gently in front of the next musician. Often these two men receive applause and sometimes some catcalls are thrown in for good measure.

One of the singers, Harry with the Black Cowboy hat, who was born on Criehaven Island way out there, beyond Matinicus, but now lives on the mainland, brings his own microphone as he plays his guitar and sings his favorite sad country music songs. I am not sure why he has own mic but his music sways me back to my earlier years. I look forward to his choices.

The truth is I can hear the music just fine with or without the microphone. The problem on not hearing begins with the musicians introducing their songs with a bit of a mumble...I strain to hear but do not get the title nor any other comments on why they are singing this song. I listen and pick up some phrases and go home and google the lines and 'ta da,' there is the title and the verses plus who wrote it and who has done some 'cover' songs around it.

Earlier in the summer, I ran into an old friend who I hadn't seen in 20+ years. We both headed in different directions and different work. She moved to the Northeast and I moved to the West Coast. When I spotted her at the Europa bar in downtown Greensboro, I offered a surprised greeting and said something like, "Do you live here Julia?"

She immediately put her forefinger to her lips as if requesting that I whisper. With her other hand she brought out a black plastic device that look like a key fob. She handed it to me. I spoke into it and her face beamed! She could hear!

Back and forth we passed this, pausing for the other to speak. Like a talking stick. As we sipped our glasses of wine, it was like my whole world slowed down. Talk. Listen. Pause. And it was in the pauses that I could do some reflecting. Her. Me. 'What is really important to say, in this moment, right now?' as if words were scarce and valuable.

Two of my daughters speak very, very fast. In noisy restaurants, I pretend to understand and then I change the subject refusing to ask them to repeat what they had just said.

Meanwhile the audience laughs and cheers Mark and Wayne

(continued on Page 2)

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 18:

- 2020 Maine Lobster Festival Poster Contest, with a \$1,000 prize. Email samples of your work – preferably lobster images – and a bio by Friday, November 1, to jbrickel@midcoast.com.
- Children’s Authors Signing Books at Maine Lighthouse Museum, 1 Park Drive, Rockland, from noon to 4 p.m. Holly J.P. Kopp, Didi Cooper and Jan Gilley will be on hand.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 19:

- Fall Craft Fair in Warren, Saturday, October 19, from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Masonic Hall, Route 90 (105 Camden Road). Crafters, baskets, knitted items, raffles, baked foods, Victory ice cream, Miller Farm custom laser engraving, and lunch for sale. Details: 236-4585.
- Interactive History Storytelling Experience, 1 to 3 p.m. at the Hahn Community Center, Main Street in Friendship. The Maine-Wabanaki REACH organization presents the event sponsored by Friendship Methodist Church to learn the history of the Wabanaki people. Registration required: MaineWabanakiReach.org. For details, call Liga Jahnke, 832-6646.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 20:

- Roller Derby Workshop in Union, at Thompson Community Center, 51 South Union Road, from 9 to 11 a.m. The Rock Coast Rollers tell what it takes to get involved in roller derby as a skater, official or volunteer. They will bring along the Bruised Boutique Skate Shop, the largest roller derby supply store in the world, based in Nashua, New Hampshire. Learn more at RockCoastRollers.org.
- “A Salute to Morse’s Sauerkraut” at Waldoborough Historical Society, 1 p.m. All museum buildings, on Main Street will be open from noon to 3 p.m. and a member of Morse’s staff will be on hand to relate the history of the shop, one of Waldoboro’s oldest businesses, and offer a taste of sauerkraut, one of the mainstays in the diet of early German settlers.
- Sunday Jams in Rockland, Sail, Power, & Steam Museum, 75 Mechanic Street, 1:30 p.m.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 21:

- Free Adult Art Classes at Rockland Public Library, 11 a.m. Catinka Knoth leads the free Monday classes
- Monday Jams at St. George Grange, at Wiley’s Corner, 7 to 9 p.m. through October. Country, gospel, folk, bluegrass.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 22:

- Pumpkin Storytime at Rockland Public Library, for pre-schoolers and toddlers, from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. Following the stories, kids will get the chance to paint mini pumpkins to take home.
- Five Weeks of “My Next Career Move” at Camden Public Library, offered from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesdays, October 22 to November 19, by New Ventures Maine. Learn how your current skills connect to future careers, identify high-growth job fields, explore education and training options, and strengthen your resume for a job search. Registration: NewVenturesMaine.org, 593-7942.
- Tuesday Jams in Thomaston, Federated Church, 8 Hylar Street, at 7 p.m. Folk, country, blues, gospel. FMI: 273-2914.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23:

- Quarry Hill Women’s Seminar on “Courageous Communication,” 9 a.m. to noon in Quarry Hill’s Women After 50 series at Anderson Inn at Quarry Hill, Camden. Interactive program to help participants connect with themselves and others. Admission is free and includes breakfast. All women 50-plus are welcome. Registration required: QHinfo@pbmc.org 301-6116.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24:

- Halloween Spooktacular at Camden Public Library, Thursday, October 24, from 6 to 7 p.m. Participants of all ages are invited to don costumes and attend the free family-friendly event with stories, crafts and games.
- “A Family for ME” Foster Care and Adoption Info Meetings, for people who have wondered about the process of becoming a licensed foster parent or adoptive parent. For the location and time of the next meeting: 615-6011 or AFamilyForMEMaine.org.
- Thursday Jams in Warren, Saint George River Cafe, 310 Main Street, 6 p.m. and Friday Open Mics, second and fourth Fridays, at 6:30 p.m.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25:

- The Blue Cafe Presents Hiroya Tsukamoto, Friday, October 25, at 7:30 p.m. Camden Opera House welcomes the acoustic guitar stylist to its intimate third-floor space. The Kyoto native and Berklee College of Music graduate has played at York City’s Blue Note and on Japanese National Television. Blue Cafe shows are free; 40 Paper provides the cash bar.
- Belfast’s Fourth Friday Art Walk, Friday, October 25, from 5:30 to 8 p.m. With open galleries and businesses, music in the streets, and more.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26:

- Meals of Hope Food Packaging Event Seeks Volunteers, on Saturday, October 26, from 9 to 11 a.m. at Rockland Elks Lodge, 210 Rankin Street. West Bay Rotary seeks 75 people to help pack up to 25,000 nutritious meals for midcoasters in need, to be distributed to food pantries and other local organizations. To take part, email EtiennePerret@gmail.com or call 632-4057.
- “Boos and Brews” at Maine Sport Outfitters, 115 Commercial Street in Rockport, on Saturday, October 26, from 5 to 7 p.m. The free public event will feature scary stories read by Maine authors, beverages from local breweries and wine from Cellardoor Winery, and door prizes.

Around Town is compiled each week by C.O.H.Gifford, Jr.
Please submit calendar items to gowrfr@gmail.com
Our thanks to The Free Press for sharing its calendar.



At the Tuls and Yang 2020 Party, Oct. 17

Photo by Ron Tesler

Pole Dancers (continued from P. 1)

on, scuttling back and forth. Keyboard Bonnie cracks jokes about them. They seem to be immune to that kind of feedback, so intent are they to bring straight lines out of tangles.

Julia discovered over a short period of time ten years ago that she was losing her hearing. The doctors said that a terrible virus that had affected her hearing. Since then she has had three Cochlear implants that have given her hearing via the ‘walking stick.’

She told me laughing, that when her husband John says “I love you” he sounds like Minnie Mouse. I felt sad. For John. Who wants to be called Minnie Mouse? I feel sad for Julia, trying so hard to find leverage in this noisy, speaking world.

After an hour or so, we have caught up but really, we were talking about how our life is now. Not so much the past. We thank each other for the time together; we nod our heads, slight smiles on our faces. The warmth of our eyes makes it not necessary to give words to our goodbyes.

These poles or columns keep the ceiling above us level and balanced. Wayne and Mark and their successors will have to contend with the frustration of microphones. On or off? Tangled or clear? We appreciate their work; it helps us to hear and move into the arena where the past becomes the present. I wonder now, if I invited Julia to come along to one of these jams, what could she hear? Maybe the vibrations would ascend up her chair and she could feel the beat, the Tuesday night rhythms, these gifts offered into the world.

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call Joe at 596-0731 or email steinberger@gwi.net

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