

McGarrity: European travel across the - Log Cabin Democrat (Conway, AR) - June 28, 2017 - page 1

June 28, 2017 | Log Cabin Democrat (Conway, AR) | Joe McGarrity is a professor of economics at the University of Central Arkansas. Contact him by email at joem@uca.edu.

Every summer, along with two other professors, I take a group of students to Florence, Italy for a study abroad trip. I require my students to write a paper and the topics typically address questions such as: How did the innovation in painting progress through the Renaissance? Why did the Renaissance occur in Italy during the 1400's? Last year, a nontraditional student wrote an essay on how her study abroad trip in the late 1950s differed from her 2016 trip. Recently, I have found myself reflecting on a similar comparison.

My daughter is in college and this summer she went on a UCA study abroad trip to the United Kingdom. Her class flew into Manchester, England and they stayed in Manchester the night before the bombing at the Ariana Grande concert. I heard about the bombing, while listening to the news on the television, while I was cooking dinner. Within 5 minutes, I was able to use FaceTime to contact my daughter to be reassured that she was okay. At the time, she was staying in Liverpool and she had not yet heard about the bombing.

I talked to Natalie Flemming, UCA's excellent study abroad coordinator, and she told me that parents had not contacted her about the safety of their children. Other parents did what I had done; they contacted their children directly. They did not need an intermediary.

In the late 1980s, when Tim Kearney and I decided to backpack across Europe, the world was very different. We each bought an expensive phone card and called home about once a week. If my parents wanted to reach me, they had to wait for my call. There was not much else they could do. If a bombing had occurred when I was in Europe, I probably would not have known about it, so I would not have thought to call them before the week was over. They would have been left to worry.

My daughter's study abroad trip and my much less structured travels are very different because of the advances in communication technology. My calls home were expensive, while my daughter, using Wi-Fi, can call home for free. Today, I can text her and get a response quickly. Again, after paying \$60 for an international calling plan, these texts are free. As a student, I could mail home pictures and postcards and they usually arrived in about 3 weeks. My daughter can send us pictures free and as an attachment to a text, they arrive in seconds – or less.

While my daughter was in London, she crossed Abbey Road, which has a live cam. I was able to text her, asking her to wave. She got the message in a flash and waved – all while being 4,000 miles away from us. In the 1980s, my parents did not see pictures of me until I got back in the U.S. and they certainly could not interact with me when I was on the street.

As they have grown up, my kids have often heard how I had to walk to school uphill both ways, through the snow, and barefoot. While every parent embellishes how different or how tough times were in their youth, when it comes to communication technology, it is hard to exaggerate how different things are today than they were a generation ago.