

Cambridge  
Mid Sept 1993

Dear Everybody,

First my apologies to C [redacted] and M [redacted] Lourdes for failing to say goodbye on the last afternoon. There was a mix-up about times and rooms. I felt rotten, as if a necessary closure had not been achieved.

I feel we did pretty well as a group, given the the massive , swirling, political undertow we had to contend with.

I retain strong pictures of moments we lived through together. Let me pick some out:

- A [redacted] leaning across M [redacted] S [redacted] in the punt to paddle powerfully with those massive arms of his.

- meeting Don M [redacted], the grandfather who had invented the sand-soil separating machine for dealing with stuff dredged up from Mexican riverbeds. I really felt I met him.

- A [redacted], retreating into his own world when the lesson became inappropriate or tedious, retreating into reading of whatever was to hand.

- the difference between week one V [redacted], understanding little and maybe dreaming of his interpreter, and week three Vladimir, a powerful, searching intellect to my right, understanding most things. Thrilling ( for an observer= teacher).

- Y [redacted]'s last day feedback about week two having been a low-ebb time for her in terms of language confidence. Suddenly she saw the prairie of English she doesn't yet know compared with the garden of her own considerable knowledge.

- My wonderment at Al [redacted] saying that really as a child he was rarely , if ever, punished. And V [redacted] suddenly bursts into the conversation to tell us that he doesn't know why his brothers got punished but not him, mostly. His spontaneous eruption in good English was one of the language high-points of the course for me. And M [redacted] S [redacted] telling us how her parents would sometimes threaten her with a God Tiger coming if she was naughty.

- a sense , for me, of our difference from the other group. Somehow it cost us more to become a group and yet by the end of week three I preferred the mutual understanding in the Common room to the more aggressive things happening in the Basement room, at least as I percieved the situation.

- My tired despair, on the first Friday as I went home, of us ever welding into a cohesive, language-friendly group, a group in which language could be produced from the heart and genuinely enriched. Language is not just a set of rules and load of bits to remember- it is much more a web of specialised feelings adding up to a modified way of being. My despair was quite out of place- you proved me 100% wrong.

- I felt really understood when I listened to the books that Celina recommended to me to improve my knowledge of that extraordinary grouping of peoples called Poland. I was strongly aware of Celina in two of her human settings: family and marketing department. Yes, I met a lot more than seven people over these three weeks: Vladimir's son, Yukiko's children (though in a slightly abstract way, Alberto's flat mates and his Dad from Zamora, Myung Soon's remarkably devoted husband and the leader of the Korean opposition, Maria Lourdes's sister who fritters her parents' money away. In the flesh you met my son, jumping from one punt bow to the other and my nephew mumbling incomprehensibly to himself in normal, everyday English.

I could ramble on a good deal more. This letter will perhaps, in parts, stir memories for you as writing it does for me.

Have a good autumn and winter,

A hug,  
Mario.



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Humanizing Language Teaching