

Features

British student exchanges ideas and information during American visit

by Liz Blum
Features Writer

The last thing one expects to hear in a summer resort area like Nagshead, N.C., is a British accent. But when you ordered a brew from the bar at the Foosball Palace, a local arcade, you would have been served with perfect English courtesy and a British clip in reply.

Most Americans are extremely curious about "different people" and the guy was constantly being questioned with "Why are you here?" "What's it like in England?" and "Do you know the Queen?"

Kevin Bean, part-time bartender and full-time student at Leeds University, always answered as politely as possible even if his answers sounded a trifle pat. BUNAC (British Universities North American Club) brought him and numerous other British students to the United States for an extended "holiday."

British student exchange

BUNAC is a form of student exchange that allows British students to work in America for a three-month interim between school sessions. About one half become summer camp counselors and the others — "the lucky ones," according to Kevin — obtain work permits. To obtain work permits the student either must have a job waiting for him or her or have relatives in the States. Kevin falls into the latter category.

He arrived at John F. Kennedy airport in New York City near the end of June. Everyone in the BUNAC group was required to stay at the YMCA for orientation classes. Group members were given various kinds of information, ranging from what to do in an emergency to avoiding certain areas, i.e., areas of high unemployment.

Most left for jobs or summer camps after two days. Kevin and two Scotsmen, Archie and Ian (whose nickname is "Chug") decided to stay for a few days to see the sights.

At first, they went the typical tourist route: going to the Empire State Building, the World Trade Center and the United Nations building. Then they hit the bars and got to know New York on its own level. "Irish bars were the best," he said. "They gave us free drinks and one offered me a job."

And what would a trip to New York be without being propositioned? At Times Square, all three

were simultaneously solicited via a brochure being handed out by representatives of a local brothel. Kevin summed it up as, "New York is a nice place to visit but I wouldn't want to live there."

After four days and an enormous amount of money, Kevin, Archie and Chug decided to head south. After almost deciding to hitch, four other BUNAC students offered them a share in a rented car as far as Petersburg, Va.

"Seven people and their luggage in a rented sedan was better than hitchhiking," Kevin said, "but not by much."

At a rest stop on the New Jersey Turnpike, Kevin ran into the word "restroom." He had asked a man where the toilets were and the man told him the restrooms were "that way." Kevin thought the man was talking about something else and replied, "Thank you but where are the toilets?"

Another first was having free refills on coffee and tea. This floored the trio when a waitress refilled their cups and didn't add it to the bill. Some things are taken for granted here.

The trio was dropped off at an interstate intersection outside Petersburg at 6 a.m. Kevin almost got run over crossing two four-lane highways to reach a truck stop. They asked around for a good resort area and were told to go to Nagshead, N.C. Our, by now, exhausted threesome caught a bus to Nagshead via Richmond and slept most of the trip.

The bus pulled into Miller's Drugstore, Nagshead's main bus stop, and let off three grubby and tired men. But at the sight of the sand and the sea, Kevin fell in love with the beach and the rest of the summer was decided: working in Nagshead.

Kevin said his holiday was made up of "sleeping, working, getting drunk and . . . that's about it."

Personally he came to the States for vacation purposes and to visit his relatives. After graduation at the end of this school term, he plans on applying his double major of physics and computer science at a job with IBM United Kingdom Ltd. (limited is equivalent to the American incorporated.)

Once he begins his job, a spare week, much less three months, would be difficult to come by for a vacation. So he felt he should take advantage of the situation when it presented itself.

Besides the United States, Kevin has travelled in Wales, France, Spain, Belgium, Holland, West Germany, Scotland and Romania. The most valuable asset of his visit has been "learning the slang. 'Really' and 'Have a nice day' — no, don't put that down. The experience. Experience is the best benefit in the world."

As to his impression of Americans, he had already formed one at Leeds with the American students he had contact with. Kevin said they vary; the tourists and locals in Nagshead are two dissimilar groups. Clothing is the most distinct difference from Britain. The blue-and-green plaids and so-called golf slacks would be something he would wear to be considered outrageous at home.

Another outrageous thing we Americans do is ruin tea. Kevin was horrified at the way tea was made and then, of all things, iced!

The majority have been very friendly, especially the student age.

"And then there are these women journalists," he said, "who come up and ask you about America." The major difference is that American women, besides being more straightforward, "love me accent."

Strong political beliefs

Kevin also holds definite political views. He is strongly opposed to the Irish Republican Army, socialism, communism, terrorist groups and left-wingers. He is pro-nuclear, likes England's Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and wholeheartedly approves of Reagan's stand on the air controllers' strike.

"Wish Thatcher would do that with the coal miners," he said.

Kevin describes himself as very conservative, very right-wingish. Leeds, he said, is full of liberals who

keep sending money to the IRA, which he feels should be spent on Leeds' students.

Kevin Bean is a prime example of what work and study exchange programs can do to stimulate our own customs and ideas by experiencing those of different people.

And, by the way, he doesn't know the Queen.



Kevin Bean is a member of the British Universities North American Club, which brought him and other British students to America this past summer. After hitchhiking from New York City to Virginia, he and two other friends caught a bus to Nagshead, N.C., where he spent the rest of the summer bartending at an arcade.