

:: OUR COMENIUS ODISSEY...

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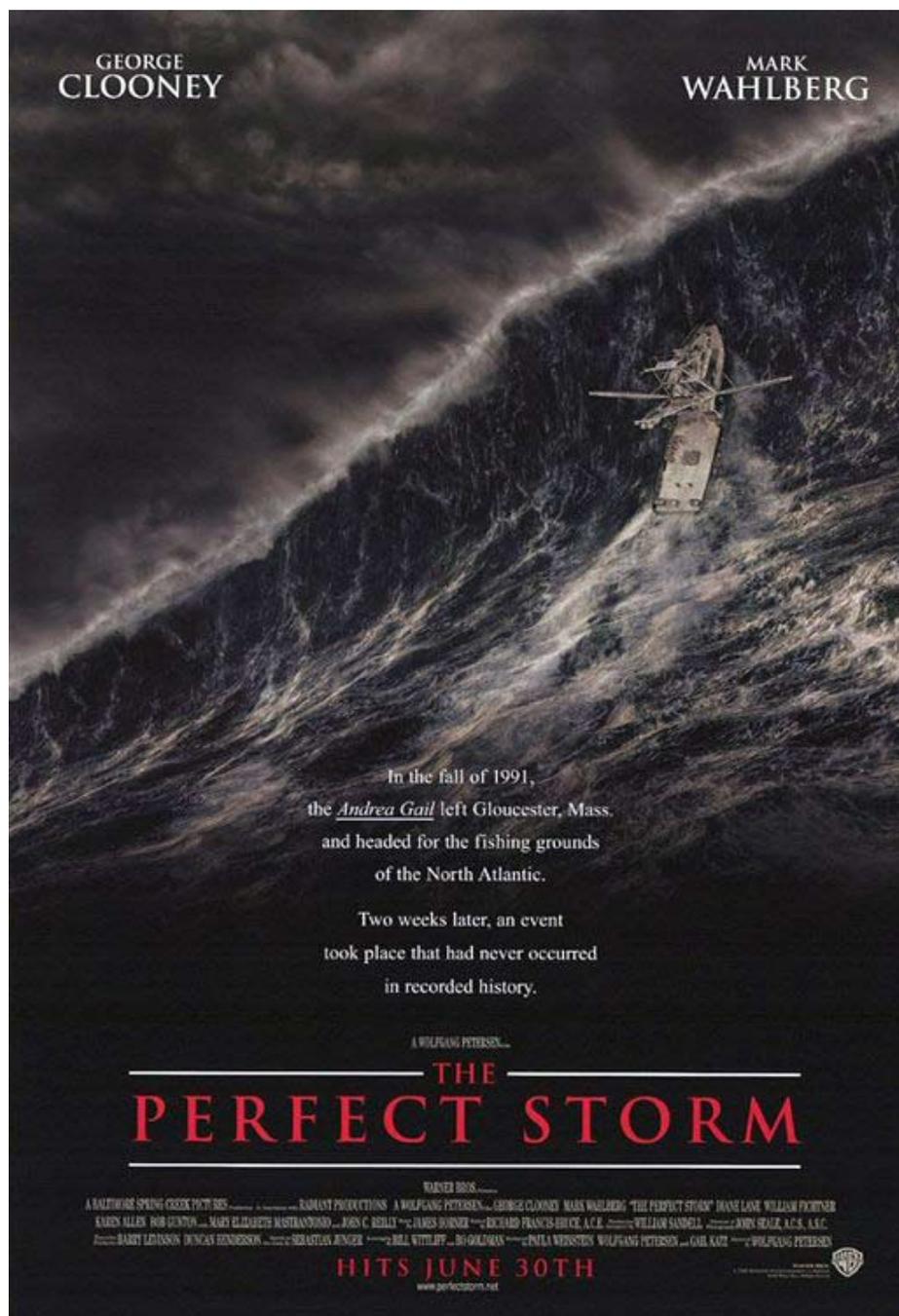
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MY COMENIUS ADVENTURE

Years ago I saw 'The Perfect Storm', a movie about some sailors who were engaged in fishing and were involved in a violent storm, which by its nature was described as perfect. From 13th to 18th April, a group of teachers and students from Finland, Turkey, Romania, Spain, Greece, Holland, Italy and Bulgaria met in Constanta, Romania for a Comenius project meeting. The week passed without incident, according to the schedule.

Everything was perfect, because perfect was the organization of all the activities the Romanian school had prepared. It was an excellent visit and it was a great pleasure to meet the friends again. The theatre-evening, where the Romanian students were singing (even in our languages!) and dancing, and the traditional Romanian things to eat afterwards, was really a surprise. We also enjoyed a boat trip along the Danube Delta, a beautiful river, a jewel of nature. The farewell dinner in a Romanian traditional restaurant with so good atmosphere, music and things to eat was a wonderful end. At the end of the evening, the sadness of saying goodbye was mixed with the hope of meeting again soon in Harderwijk, Netherlands.

On Sunday, April 18th at six o'clock in the morning we all met at school to take the bus to Otopeni Airport in Bucharest. Focus on the activities of the project meeting, we did not know that an Icelandic volcano was to collapse all the airports in Europe. A few minutes later after arriving at the airport the news we have read the day before on the Internet were confirmed: all the flights were cancelled and the airport was closed. The unexpected problems with the cancelled flights were a very strange end of this project meeting. No words to describe the feeling I felt, it was not fear of course, but uncertainty causes insecurity. I am sorry that we could not give the last hugs, kisses, handshakes quietly to each other at the airport ... Personally I was con-



fused, it was necessary to take decisions, we couldn't come back by plane and we were so far away from home. I remembered the movie 'The Perfect Storm': We were thousands of kilometres from home. The means of transport, the hotels were collapsed and we had students under our responsibility. Besides this, there was a train strike in France.

It took more than five hours to get a ticket to

Munich, the nearest city to Spain we could arrive. At dusk we left Bucharest by train. Fortunately we could book a couchette train. We spent all night travelling. From my seat, in the darkness of the night, I could sense the nice Romanian landscapes. I thought that I was crossing the Carpathian Mountains, the town of Bran, Dracula's Castle, Peles, Brasov ... places that just a year before I was lucky to visit. The train stopped at Curtici, the last vil-



lage in Romania before entering Hungary. Passport control, a forgotten ritual in this part of Europe and a quick coffee in the restaurant of the train.

We arrived in Budapest railway station at mid-morning. What a beautiful train station! We had enough time for a good breakfast before taking another train. Possibly we crossed a part of the Slovak Republic before entering Austria. The train just stopped in Vienna. Late in the evening we reached Munich, where we spent the night at the hotel Arthotel Munich. What a coincidence, looking for accommodation we met the Finnish partners! The hotels were extremely expensive for the airline

crisis. We got a new ticket by train to Zurich, it was impossible to travel nearer to Spain. We left Munich at 6:45 a.m and arrived in Zurich by mid-morning.

We were confirmed that it was impossible to reach any destination in Spain by train for several days. We were also informed that the trains were on strike in France, but that there were coaches to travel to Spain. I remembered that my father, an immigrant for many years in Switzerland, sometimes travelled by bus from Bern or Zurich to Salamanca with the company Alsa. It was not difficult to find the bus station in the street Limmatstrasse, the information they gave us in the Rail Swiss

Travel Centre was very helpful.

When we reached the station, a small square with some stands, Alsa's office had closed, and will open again at 2:30. While my colleague María and the students waited to be opened, I walked away to ask in a travel agency nearby. When I was about to go into the agency, my mobile rang, it was Marina from Spain, my director, to say that my colleague María was desperately trying to phone me to tell that a bus had just come from Portugal, and was going to leave in five minutes. I do not know what problems there were between my mobile and the one of María because I could receive her calls, but immediately jumped voicemail and I couldn't answer.

As I ran desperately to take the bus my mobile rang again and again. María was trying to contact with me. Imagine the desperation of the situation: the bus was leaving, I did not answer, God knows when we would have another chance to travel to Spain. I ran and ran. Within minutes I was sitting on the bus. Psychologically I felt at home, but we would still have to drive about 2000 kilometres for this to be true. Around 13:30 the coach left Zurich. We arrived in Burgos at 7:00, and at 15:00, in the bus station of Salamanca ended our odyssey. I would have never imagined such a long and unexpected travel: From one end to the other of the old Roman Empire, from Dacia in the Black Sea to Salamanca in Lusitania. An unforgettable lesson in geography and history through Romania - Hungary - Austria - Germany - Switzerland - France - Spain. We have travelled more than 3800 kms. in three days and a half.

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