

GERMANY, SWITZERLAND, and AUSTRIA -2001



HOTELS

September 4: Schlosshotel Lerbach

- Lerbacher Weg, D-51465 Bargisch, Germany
- First Class 48 Room Manor House in a 100-acre park

September 5,6: Aboard Rhine Line Cruise Ships

- KD German Rhine Lines
- 15 Frankenwerft, D-5000 Cologne 1, Germany

September 7: Treschers Schwarzwald Hotel

- Seestrasse 10, D-79822 Titisee-Neustadt, Germany
- First Class on the Shores of Lake Titisee

September 8,9: Hotel Schweizerhof

- Schweizerhofquai 3, CH-6003 Lucerne, Switzerland
- First Class on the Shores of Lake Lucerne

September 10: Hotel Bayerischer Hof

- Postfach 1126, D-8990 Lindau, Germany
- First Class on the Shores of Lake Constance

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September 11,12: Arabella Sheraton Westpark

- Garmischer Strasse 2, 80339 Munich, Germany
- Business Class in outskirts

September 13,14: Hotel Salzburg

- Schwarzstrasse 5-7, A-5020 Salzburg, Austria
- First Class on Shores of Salz River

September 15,16: Hotel Bristol

- Kaertner Ring 1, A-1015 Vienna, Austria
- Luxury Class in Old Town Vienna

GERMANY 2001

To the music of Ravel's Bolero emanating from the audio headsets, our Boeing 767 took to the air from the Chicago's O'Hare airport. We had been planning this trip to Germany and Austria for nine months. It was finally happening. We were anxiously waiting getting to Europe. We sat back in our seats, listened to the music, and imagined what we were about to experience. In synchronization to the cadence of the ostinato of this ballad of a bullring, the tires echoed a thud, thud, thud on the cement runway, faster and faster, as we gained speed. Finally, fortissimo, we lifted into the air and were on our way. Little did we know as we took flight, that events would unfold during our trip that would indelibly record it in our memories for a lifetime.

It was an eight hour flight that none of us were looking forward to. First, we got dinner, which wasn't too bad, when you think of your typical airline menus. Then we got to enjoy the delightful adult cartoon, Shrek. And, finally, we had to figure out how to sleep, sitting vertically in a seat as comfortable as a hard wooden church pew. No amount of penance or complimentary bottles of wine was going to facilitate that task. Those seats were not made for restful slumber, particularly when you know you must. The best any of us accomplished was maybe, three to four hours of shut eye.

Our destination was Dusseldorf, a highly industrial city of about five hundred thousand people, located about midway on Germany's western border with France. Like almost everything else we saw in this town, the airport was brand new and clean. It was as if it had been just taken out of the wrapper and put on display for our visit. Our passport check in was a breeze. We had your typically gruff agent; you know the one who never smiles and gives the impression he going to order your incarceration at any moment. But, after that, we walked into a terminal that resembled a shopping mall rather than a station.



Surprisingly, there was no customs check. We just grabbed our bags, followed the Ausgang signs and within fifty feet we were out on the street. It happened so fast that we missed seeing the "necessary rooms". Some had to return, in a rush, back into the building.

Our entourage of eight divided into two equal groups and grabbed a couple of taxis at a stand that was functioning with all the efficiency of a well-oiled German machine. Each car was assigned one makeshift interpreter whose job was to communicate our destination. Although our "deutsche sprechen" required a lot of work, the

navigation skill of our two drivers was the far worse. After a few futile attempts to verbalize the name of our hotel, the Schloss Lerbach in Gerbish Gladbach, we just pointed to a sheet of paper upon which it was written. Regardless of their claim of knowing where it was, both were clueless as to its location and, both taxis, travelling independently, got thoroughly lost in their journey.

Neither driver had trouble putting their BMWs into low orbit on the Autobahn. Moving along at over a hundred and ten miles an hour, the only thing that seemed to keep our vehicle from going airborne was the death grip each of us had any handle or seat belt. I tried to comfort those in that back seat that the two hundred on the speedometer was in kilometers, not miles. Regardless, it was about twice as fast as most of us

drove, excluding Sharyn of course. Almost instantly, we drove the fifty kilometers and arrived in the general location of our hotel, but that was when the real fun began. We got to see far more of the countryside than we intended.

For fifteen minutes we roamed, stopping every so often while our driver of Iranian or Turkish descent jumped out of his vehicle and literally chased down some pedestrian for a new set of instructions. Some even ran from his pursuit. On many of his reconnaissance efforts, he would return mumbling a German phrase we all recognized – die "schietzen" instructions or "intelligent" taxi driver. We were certain it was taking us so long that the other car must have already arrived and that they had initiated a search party for us. Finally, when we arrived at the Schloss we found out, the other taxi was getting a longer tour more than we. They didn't arrive for another ten minutes.

Schloss in German meant castle. Unlikely what you imagined of a castle, there were no moats, towers, or high walls. Our rooms were in a stately, gray stone mansion in forested park of several hundred acres of rolling hills and ponds. When our taxi driver saw the place, unquestionably for the first time, he mumbled another word we easily recognized – "capitalists". Our tour director, Shelley explained that in German, a schloss meant that someone of nobility gave this building to you. It was more of a stately manor rather than a fortification.

On May 13, 1384, Baron von Desbrugge gave the house to the knight Johann von Hoenen. It had gone intact through several families until 1893 when Richard Zanders, a local industrialist tore down the original structure due to dampness and rebuilt what we were staying in. Dr. Wendlin and his brother Dr. von Siemens now owned the house. It had even been used as a set in an evening television series.

Our Schloss had forty rooms for guests. We occupied eighteen and some German electronics firm was using the remainder for their off-site business meeting. What was so intriguing about these accommodations was that every room was different. For the first time ever, Sharyn and I won the best of the selection. We had an anteroom, a bedroom, a two-room bath, and a 10-ft by 30-foot patio just outside our window. It ran along the backside of the roof. Naturally, we relished in our good fortune, inviting any one and every one to join us and sit on OUR veranda and inhale the opulence of the park scenery.



Almost prophetically, the hotel management put the Kellies in another building, out in the carriage house, far away from the rest of us. No, he hadn't sang his "Was ist dis mein dear?" yet. But, we were sure the management was clairvoyant and chose to protect the sanctity of their other guests.

Dinner that evening started with usual introductions. While sampling the local wines, everyone got the opportunity to "meet and greet". The tour group was composed of thirty-four people mostly married couples of retirement age and one pleasant autistic man in his twenties, traveling with his parents. Except for one couple who was on their seventh Tauck tour, it was the first Tauck tour for everyone. Our four couples from Tennessee had already been labeled as the "Gang of Eight".

Our tour director was Shelley Sampson. She was forty-seven, five-foot ten, dressed in early Heide, and had "dish water" blonde hair, which she kept tightly braided and pulled over the top of her head, much like the caricature Helga. She had never been married and had been born and raised in Portland Maine, the childhood home of Larry and Beth Bucklin. She came to Germany many years ago for voice lessons, stayed for nine years, and learned the language. When asked her how she got into directing tours, she just commented that it was a

long sad story, of which she latter told us "bits and pieces". She had been engaged twice, but never made it to the altar. (As the trip progressed, some of us developed some good theories what might have happened.) Besides the German tour, she also did Hawaii tours and had just returned from one. Her jet lag was obviously worse than ours.

Shelley was very knowledgeable of this region and we enjoyed her many impromptu seminars. As we traveled, she handed out maps and guide material in advance of the major attractions. She was also exceptionally well organized. Even though it was the first time this trip had been run in reverse direction, that never seemed to diminish her ability to inform, organize, and keep the whole shebang moving smoothly. Without a doubt she scored an "A plus" in this credential.

Drawing from her previous experience as a voice student, she serenaded us "a cappella" on several occasions. Her most memorable song was the Heinrich Heine's world famous "Song to the Loreley". No, we didn't get Shelley's rendition of any of the tunes from the "Sound of Music". She said she hated "The Sound of Music". She never told us why, but when Sharyn asked her to sing "Edelweiss", she refused and sang a Hawaiian farewell song instead.

Despite her outstanding organization skills, Shelley also had less pleasant side. Her "people skills" were a little weak. For a tour director her sense of humor was a little shallow. Often she was unnecessarily "quick" with a group that "just wanted to have fun" and frequently embarrassed the paying guests. By the end of the first couple of days she was already a minus thirty-four on Larry Bucklin's score card and he was wondering how big a tip he should expect from her. Initially, we thought it was just "jet lag" and chose to give her "some space". But, it never really improved.

Accompanying us on this trip was Erika Boehm, a five-foot ten, attractive, thirty-some blonde, "guide to be". Shelley referred to her as "student director". For the most part, she kept to herself. A couple of times Shelley had her make small presentations of some point of interest. Shelley was working very hard on her training. Together at breakfast or at dinner, they huddled, marking up the maps and other handouts, which Shelley planned to distribute.

Our driver was Bernd Schroeder. He was in his thirties, was dark haired, sported a broad moustache, and was slightly shorter than our directors. He spoke only German so we never learned much about him. Nevertheless, he was a master at maneuvering our fifty-foot long carriage with the adroitness one would exercise with a Volkswagen "beetle."

It was only a few days before all thirty-five people had bonded and were enjoying everyone else's company. It was quite the opposite of our experience on our prior tour through Italy, where the group never coalesced. On that trip our outstanding guide, Franko, lamented many times that he tried every trick he knew to pull his charges together, but nothing worked.

He would have loved this bunch. Every day seemed like a party. They ate together, drank together, and sang together, even the most horrible of ditties – "Was ist dis mein dear". Also, can you image sixty-year olds running around dining rooms, acting and sounding like goats. Oh yes, we had a few of those, who will remain anonymous. In Speyer, while roaming the back roads in the dark of night, this boisterous group was even asked to keep it quiet by kids hanging out the window of a youth hostel. The young kids were trying to sleep and the old kids were keeping them awake. There were many occasions when I thought the "Gang of Thirty Five" was going to get out of control, but Shelley knew when and how to "reel them in."

"Tauck Does Tours Right!" It was a class act all the way. Previously, we had done a tour with Grand

European, which was quite typical of the mid-range, price-wise alternatives, such as the better known company, Globus. There was an order of magnitude difference. These other companies had all these optional side trips, which were barely mentioned until you were with them; then, they became something you just couldn't miss, of course for an extra fee. There were no side trips with Tauck. Everything was included. Furthermore, the other tours provided about half your meals, which were pre-prepared and of average quality, at best. On most days Tauck provided three meals at the best restaurants and you ordered from the menu. The food was outstanding. We gorged ourselves on appetizers, soups, salads, entrees, and, of course, "to die for" deserts.

Those other tour companies ran you through all the "freebie" attractions, paid for by your potential purchase of their wares at the end of a short demonstration, such as glass-blowing factories, leather-goods shops, souvenir shops, etc. That may have been "your event" for the day. Tauck did none of that. In fact, Tauck refused to hand out any products that blazoned their logo, providing them with free walking advertisement and thereby marking you as a tourist. At all our stops, we had appointments and usually received a private showing with one or more excellent local guides. Frequently, we divided into several smaller groups, each with its own guide, making it easy to hear the discussion and get answers to any questions.

Even our "I will never go on one of those horrible extravaganzas, herded around by someone toting an umbrella held high over-head while pleading 'Please keep up' " companion (aka Terry), said he truly enjoyed himself and the Tauck method. He said he was ready to do it again, but with Tauck.

Our first morning in Germany wasn't exactly as we had hoped. It had lightly rained all evening and continued to drizzle intermittently as we toured Cologne, by bus or by foot. We visited the Romish-Germanisches Museum and the gothic Cathedral of St. Peter and Mary, otherwise known as the Dom-Cologne Cathedral.

Founded in 50 AD, Cologne (i.e. Koln in German with "snake eyes" over the "o") was originally a colony of the Roman Empire. That was how it got its name. It was the birthplace of Agrippina, the highly political mother of the Emperor Nero and wife of Emperor Cladius named it Colonia Agrippina before she poisoned him. As one of the largest and major trading centers in medieval Europe, the city was full of antiquities. You couldn't dig anywhere without unearthing some archeological treasure. It was common experience for any new construction to have to wait three to five years while they relocated some historical gem they discovered under a few inches of soil. It was such a loss when the Second World War wiped out millennia of history in a matter of minutes.



Most of the Roman finds were preserved in the Romish-Germanisches Museum. It housed one of the largest intact Roman mosaics ever found, a 750 square-foot Dionysos mosaics. Composed of little one-inch, white and sky blue square tiles, it was the main floor of a third century villa and reminded me of a floor from a bathhouse. It was in remarkably good shape. Virtually none of the tiles that comprised dozens of portraits of Romans were missing. After they found it, they built the museum around it, instead of risking a move with it.

With its twin Gothic spires, the tallest in Europe, Dom-Cologne Cathedral was very distinctive. Whereas, most of Cologne was destroyed during the Second World War, by a mass attack that was reported to have dropped three thousand tons of bombs in ninety minutes, the Cathedral was spared. The allies used it as a navigational landmark in their bombing runs. Built in 1248, it has become the most visited Cathedral in Europe.

It had lavishly carved choir stalls, the oldest in Germany, a thousand-year old, life-size cross, the oldest in existence, and housed the remains of the Three Wise Men of the nativity, supposedly. That last claim was dubious, as our local guide, Arno, explained because in the Middle Ages relics were a big business for the Catholic Church. It was common for there to be multiple "originals" of relics. The THREE Wise men, at last count, were numbering around NINE.

That comment brought back a memory from my childhood in catholic grade school. The nun was selling little statues she had received from the Cathedral in Chicago. Each one she claimed had a tiny piece of the cross of crucifixion. Even as a young boy I could add and multiply. I thought to my myself - if this relic was only molecules, that cross had to have been enormous with the millions of statues like this one, distributed over a thousand years. Part of this story seemed wrong.

Before boarding our Rhine River cruise ship, the MS Britannia, we made one more stop the building at 4711 known through out the world for the aroma originated there – Eau de Cologne. Originally, sold as medicine that claimed to cure anything imaginable, it became a fragrance earlier in the twentieth century when government regulations started demanding proof of medical claims. Once a protected secret formula, the ingredients were know to consist of water with distilled alcohol containing aromatic neroli oil, rosemary oil, lavender oil, lemon oil, bergamot oil and petit-grain oil. There was fountain just inside the front door building that constantly squirted a small stream of the stinky stuff.



MS Britannia was waiting for us just a couple of miles away at a dock on the Rhine. Our Tauck group joined about 140 passengers who boarded in Dusseldorf and had ridden for day. Our ship had four levels: on the top was a sundeck with swimming pool; on the second level was a dining hall and lounge/party room; on the third level was "A" deck cabins; and on the fourth level was "B" deck cabins.

Because of the weather, we didn't see much of the top level. We sat most of the time in the lounge sipping a glass of weisbier or reisling wine and watching the remarkable scenery pass us by. The cruise line gave us a book detailing by tenth of kilometer marker a description of everything we passed.

Our cabin was on "A" deck. It barely had enough room for our bathroom, vanity/closet and two twin beds: against one wall was a Murphy bed, and against the other wall was hide-a-bed couch. Although the toilet area was a little cramped, the shower was huge. Regardless, we had a three-foot by five-foot picture window that provided us with a great view of the starboard side scenery. Our boat attempted to mimic all the amenities of a luxury cruise liner. And I, who didn't like cruises, had to admit it was a very convenient mode of touring.

However, unlike cruise ships at sea that traveled at night and docked during the day, our boat did just the opposite. We docked in the evening. It was when we could disembark and go into town. It began travelling early in the morning before sunrise. With the hypnotic rhythm from the soft low pitch of the motors and from the waves splashing against the side of the hull, it was hard to wake up. Nevertheless, as the sun rose (it was in the sky, somewhere, we were sure of it; even though the rain clouds hide most of the time), the odor of freshly brewed coffee would filter into our rooms. We would sit up in bed, pull back the drapes of our picture window, and sit transfixed watching the fairytale countryside pass us by.

The river Rhine was a major thoroughfare for commerce. It extended for five hundred miles, the length of Germany, from Bodensee (aka Lake Constance) on the south to the Baltic Sea on the north. In its northern two-thirds the river was fairly straight. But, in its headwater region in the south, it was very serpentine as it descended from the Alps. The Germans, however, straightened it out with a series of canals and locks. In the section of river we were traveling to Strasbourg, there were two major locks: one, five miles just north of the

city and, the second, right at the city. Although there were a few narrow spots, the river was almost a constant tenth of a mile wide. Traffic was fairly heavy. Every five minutes, we would pass a container ship of some sort or another cruise liner.

Passing through the locks was an experience in itself. At the first one our captain pulled our ship in and parked it against the wall on the port side. Behind us, a tug pushing two barges, which together were the length of our vessel, pulled along our starboard side. Without incurring any collisions while using only one "rope boy" on the bow of the first barge, the boats were parked only inches apart from one another and from the walls. These guys were truly experts. Even our Old Hickory riverboat captains were amazed at the precision. (Naturally, some of us ignored their non-flattering comments about the Germans captains having better help.)

As soon as both boats were set, the aft floodgate shut and the water began to rise. In about fifteen minutes we rose about twelve feet. In discomfort the Britannia cried out only a few times about the tightness with squeals of metal on cement. The forward gate opened and we were on our way.

In the seventies the Germans conducted a major cleanup of the river; it was immaculate. There was no refuse anywhere or any indication that there ever was any. There were no billboards, gauche ads nor graffiti. Nearly the entire bank was riprapped and had walking, running, and bicycle trails. The river was virtually a park in itself. We couldn't image anything like it in the States, where litter and graffiti were apparently a "first amendment right of free expression." A sad contrasting commentary would be to take a ride down the Cumberland River from its headwaters at Cumberland Lake to the mouth on the Ohio River.

The weather chose not to cooperate for the remainder of the day. It rained until evening. But, it didn't really matter. This section of the river between Cologne and Koblenz, our destination for the evening, was relatively plain – mostly flat with your standard urban scenery. We just relaxed, sitting either in the aft dining room being served a meal every four hours or in the forward game room imbibing glasses of Weisbier, Reisling or various other apéritifs.



We docked at Koblenz and after dinner went ashore for a wine tasting party. In a cool, dark and damp, mountain cave, we sat around tables built from old wine kegs, sampling five sequential harvests of Reisling wine. The owner of the vineyard in a brief "show and tell" program taught us how quality in a wine was determined. There, like bats in a dark cave illuminated by candlelight, we sipped the nectar of the grape. Starting with the earliest harvest, which was very dry and somewhat astringent, we progressed to last harvest, which was medium dry and relatively sweet. These neophytes thought they were now wine experts. For the remainder of the trip the catch phrase became, "does it dance on your tongue with a long lasting flavor?"

We didn't return to the boat until midnight and, at 5:30, the boat was on the move again. That was hardly enough time for sleep deprived travelers to recover. It seemed like morning came earlier. We were informed that this region of the river was "the trip" and must not be missed. So valiantly, before the sun even attempted to rise and before the mist had lifted from the river, everyone gathered topside on the observation deck.



We were in Moselle country. Almost vertically, the hills rose from the river's edge to about a couple a hundred feet. They were lush and green. Like a patchwork quilt, there were blocks of vineyards interspersed by blocks of grassy rock lands. In the vineyards the parallel lines of the trellises were oriented up and down, vertically, rather than left and right, horizontally. With slopes steeper than 60 degrees, we couldn't imagine how they could manage a harvest. There was nothing to keep the picker from rolling down the side into the river. Why didn't they plant horizontally, like almost everyone else in the world? We asked that question the previous evening at wine tasting. We were told this configuration made it easier for the estate to be divided among the sons upon the death of the father. That reason was not self-evident.

In this area there were many castles – real ones with high dark gray stone walls and dominating towers. At almost every major bend or narrowing, they commanded the river from high up in the hills, on the peaks. In the thirty-five miles of this stretch of river we counted twenty-three castles. Some were military fortifications; some were old tollbooths, extracting a duty from anyone daring to pass. Virtually all had been restored and converted into hotels, museums, or mansions. We took pictures of many, but after awhile one castle began looking just like another.

If the narrowing of the river had small stretch of level ground, there would be village. They were postcard settlements with white and tan wallboard and dark brown wood-beam houses in the Tudor style. Each also had its similarly constructed, majestic church or monastery. Like a medieval snapshot, frozen in time, we were witnessing a fairytale picture-book land. What an anomaly! In this Internet era with its modern and crowded suburban life, how could something like this world still have existed? But, here it was and it wasn't Brigadoon. We expected to see a knight on horseback raising through the streets.

Heinerich Heine had made this section of the river famous with his emotional ballad to the maiden Loreley. While we were returning from our wine tasting trip, Shelley prepared us for what was supposed to be a moving experience. She serenaded us with the first verse of the ballad. Loreley was once a mortal girl. When her lover proved unfaithful, she threw herself from the top of a peak at that bend in the river. Subsequently, when sailors passed that spot they were lured to their death among long since removed reefs by her eldritch songs. She said the boat would play the melody as we passed it. We were primed.



Oh my, we almost missed it and we think the purser did! On a distant peninsula, there was about ten-foot tall, bronze statue, darkened by the weather. Unless someone pointed out to us, we would have never seen it. Where was our song to Loreley? It didn't play until we had passed by more than a kilometer both the statue and promontory point from whence she mythological leaped. It was a scratching recording that we could barely hear. It was hardly a solemn event. It turned out to be a major non-event. We stood on the sun deck exchanging words of disbelief, "oh, that can't be what we waited for. Just wait. It must be around the next bend." I guess this was the German version of Tennessee's "Ruby Falls."

Around Rudesheim the topography flattened out again. The towns and villages grew in size and lowered in visual appeal. We were

back in modern day suburbia. It was time for a nap and catch up on the sleep we had been missing.

At Mainz we left the boat and traveled by bus into Heidelberg. Our local guide Margaret was waiting for us. She was a delight. She exuded personality and thoroughly enjoyed her work. The weather, unfortunately, continued not to cooperate. It drizzled on our ride to the city and then poured on us, once we exited the bus for our walking tour of the castle. Margaret was undaunted. It seemed she didn't even know it was raining. She did her best to compensation for a less than favorable circumstance. She had endless stories about the City of Worms and its notorious bishops, Mannheim and origins of Mercedes Benz, and of the origins of the local wines, such as Liebfraumilch.

As we drove through countryside on our way to Heidelberg, it was relatively flat and horizon to horizon with vineyards, much like cornfields in Iowa. With all these grapes, the obvious question was "who picks them all?" Surely, not the high wage Germans. That was correct. They used 10DM/hour migrant workers from Poland in an almost identical fashion as the US used migrant workers from Mexico. They harvested the fruit for four months, starting in August with the least expensive table wines selling at \$5 a bottle and ending in December or January with the prized eiswein or desert wines, which could sell for as much as \$250 a bottle.



Heidelberg castle sat high above and dominated the city of Heidelberg. It evolved over 400 years, commencing in the 14th century with gothic construction and continuing in the renaissance period with baroque until it was destroyed. Much of the castle was laid to ruin with French King Louis XIV's 1689 attack on the Palatinate. It wasn't until the 19th century that any significant restoration was attempted and that was minimal. The most unique thing to see at the castle was the Heidelberg Tun or Grosse Vat. It was one of the largest wine vats in Europe. It held 55,000 gallons. It was built and installed in 1751. The legend of the vat was that the court jester was charged with protecting it. However, he died one day from drinking water because he drank wine for so long he couldn't tolerate anything else.

Arriving at the castle, we donned umbrellas or raincoats and headed for the halls of the "Student Prince". Margaret animatedly explained every nook and cranny. As we stood in the courtyard, she explained the origins of every statue that still adorned the sandstone and brick walls of the ruins, she told us of the hall of mirrors, and lastly she took us to the Grosse Vat. She had a "slice of time" to share with us about each. And, the rain? What rain? Margaret barely noticed it and neither did a young couple getting married.

With the girl in her white wedding gown and standing under umbrellas in the Cove on the Great Terrace, no more than twenty feet from us, they exchanged vows in front of their minister. Off in the distance and far below us was the city of Heidelberg. The castle was a very popular wedding spot. Nuptials were held at least twice a day at noon and six.

That evening, the boat docked in Speyer. The magician Murelli was the entertainment for the evening. Tauck people decided they would rather take a walk and try to exercise off some of the pounds we gaining. We also heard there were a few beer gardens ashore. In small groups of six we headed out into the dark of the night on our quest, only to meet up with each other on abandoned streets with nothing to report. It was 10 PM and they had rolled up the sidewalks.

The remainder of the boat ride of the following day from Speyer to Strasbourg was not too interesting. We used that time to finally catch up on some of the sleep. Strasbourg was in France and the in the Alsace Region,

which bordered between Germany and France. This area had changed nationalities so often, four times in the last century, back and forth between Germany and France, that the people had developed their own language, a dialect of French and German. Nevertheless, the buildings in the old town still preserved the Tudor style of architecture so typical of southern Germany.

One thing we noticed as we drove through the French countryside both by boat in a canal off the Rhine and then by bus was that the nearly antiseptic cleanliness was gone. Where we would never see even a hint of trash in Germany, it was prevalent in France, not to the point of being distracting, but to the point of being noticeable. We were sorry to note France was much like the States in this matter.

When we said good bye the MS Britannica, Margo our local guide and Bernd our driver met us. We were heading first to the great sandstone Gothic Notre Dame Cathedral in the Strasbourg in the Alsace Region and then onto Lake Titisee in the Black Forest.

There were three primary attractions for the Cathedral: its seemingly lopsided architecture, the stained glass windows, and the astrological clock. When it was originally built with its one spire on the left, it was the tallest structure in Christendom. It looked like they totally forgot to build the one on the right. It was one of those situations where it was originally designed to have two spires, but they ran out of money. They couldn't put it in the middle because the architecture could not take the weight. So they put it on the left side and nothing on the right.

The stained glass windows were the oldest in Germany. Whereas, almost every other churches lost their windows due to some war, these survived. On numerous occasions they were removed when hostilities developed and returned to their mountings when the "all clear" signs were given. As do most cathedral windows they interpreted the bible for a generally illiterate public.

At the rear of the church far to the left was the astrological clock. Ten-feet wide and thirty-feet tall, it was covered with figures of Roman gods and other pagan symbols of the zodiac. We were surprised to see such a huge structure of this nature in such a prominent position in a Catholic Cathedral. The answer was that this Cathedral was not always catholic. In the sixteenth century it was lost to the Protestant Reformation in the thirty-year's war. The clock was constructed in this period of religious renaissance. King Louis XIV returned the building to the Catholic Church in 1681.

After our brief hour and a half tour, we were back on the bus heading for Lake Titisee in the lower eastern corner of Germany, known as the Black Forest. One hundred miles long and thirty-eight miles wide, it gained this moniker and the consequential notoriety due to the fact that less than 16% of the sunlight penetrated the thick, dark green foliage, of spruce, Norwegian pine, and other evergreen trees and reached the ground. For nearly a thousand years when the forest was in control by the Romans, few people entered it. The rumor was that beasts inhabited the unholy darkness. Those who entered would never to exit.



What a fantastic setting it was for stories to scare little kids and some adults. The Grimm brothers thought so. They collected tales and folklore from the peoples who eventually braved the darkness and made their homes therein. Hansel and Gretel, Cinderella, Snow White, and Little Red Riding Hood were some fables popularized by their "Household Tales" published in 1812 and 1815 and expanded in 1857 as Grimm's Fairy Tales.

As our bus drove through the Black Forest, we observed that this mountainous terrain of remarkable beauty remained heavily wooded. And yes, it was Black! If you just wanted to get away from reality and immerse yourself in the time of your childhood fantasies, we found the place. With its numerous lakes, many Europeans frequently laid that fabled "trail of crumbs" into it as a very popular weekend get away or vacation spot. Lake Titisee, our destination, was on the top of their list.

Our hotel was Trescher's Schwarzwald, right on the edge of the lake. As each of us walked into our rooms, we rushed onto our private patio to partake in the spectacular view of an assure-blue lake, picturesquely framed with a mountainous background of blue spruce forest. We were drawn to the edge of the lake as by a magnet. When we looked back from there at our hotel, everyone in our tour group was standing on their patio entranced as we. With the three-story Tudor façade and the network of dark brown wooden beams, that image was like the TV show, the Hollywood Squares. The picture was further enhanced with a little sprinkle of falling snow.

We couldn't stand there too long. The stores were closing in one hour and we had to select an authentic Black Forest cuckoo clock, for which this region became famous a couple of hundred of years ago. The residents had little else to do in the long winter months. To pass the time and earn a little geld, they started carving these clocks.

As we suspected, we didn't have far to go. There were dozens of little one-room shops on the street next to the hotel on a road that ran along the lake. Sharyn wasted no time. In minutes with members of our tour group egging her on, she found her clock. Not being one who makes hasty purchase decisions, I convinced her to think about it and do a little more shopping. Reluctantly she agreed to my sage advice, but for the remainder of the evening her only thoughts were for that clock. Ten minutes after the stores opened the next morning, she had her clock.

This purchase was important because many of our childhood memories are associated with the Black Forest. Besides the fairytales which left their marks of our young psyche, so did this clock. Grandma was German and had one. As she sat on the edge of our bed reading nighttime stories from the Brothers Grimm, she would tell us about her clock and how its little bird was born in this same story land. During the day we would sit for hours and wait for it to immerge. Now, each time the little cuckoo extols the time of day, it reminds us of that magical time in our lives and of the incomparable love of grandmas.

Besides cuckoo clocks this region was famous for its Germany Cherry Cake. Shelley described it about a half-hour before our bus reached the hotel. By the time we pulled into the parking lot at 4 PM, everyone planned to skip dinner and go straight for cake. But, the hotel had sold out. In Germany, eating cake was an afternoon desert, not one for the evening. Shelley had laid the seeds for a mutiny, a lynching. She had two choices: find some cake or walk the plank. She had lived with the "Gang of Thirty Five" long enough to know she had better find some cake. As we left the hotel in the morning, she made sure everyone knew she had purchased two cakes. She would serve them when we reached Lucerne.



On our way to Lucerne, we stopped at the Wildegg Castle. Originally acquired by Kaspar Effinger in 1483, it was fully furnished from Renaissance era and now a well-maintained public museum, displaying five hundred years of the Effinger family history. The twenty or so rooms in the Manor House were just like they might have been when the family occupied them. The picture postcard gardens, both vegetable and flowers, were well manicured and in true German

discipline every plant was precisely in its place with nary an unintentional weed, such as the cannabis plants that I found.

Our visit was on early Saturday morning. The only people on the castle grounds were a dozen teenage girls having a slumber party in the nearby carriage house and other group of girls riding horses in a nearby field. We were able to walk casually from room to room on a self-guided tour.

As we continued our drive into Switzerland, Shelley gave us a brief history of the Swiss people. Originally they worked for the Romans as toll collectors on the Alpine passages into the northern regions of the Empire. When Rome collapsed they decided to go into business for themselves and not serve any other nation, thus laying the seeds that developed into their intensely independent culture.

William Tell became an icon of Swiss independence by his revenge on the tyrannical Austrian bailiff, Gessler. The story of shooting the apple from his son's head made him a mythological folk hero. The death of Gessler led to an obstinate war between the cantons of Switzerland and Austria that didn't end until 1499. Since then Switzerland has not been subservient to, nor has it been aligned with any nation. Unfortunately, as romantic as that story was, no portion of it has ever been substantiated by historians. But, like so many other myths of that nature, facts never deter the "true believers".

Regardless, the country's goal is to be totally self-sufficient. Switzerland is not a member of the European Economic Union. 86% of all goods sold in the country is manufactured in Switzerland. Even though they have been neutral in every war for the past five hundred years, they maintain a very aggressive military program. Every Swiss male is expected to serve in the military: active duty for 2 years and inactive duty until age fifty. Every male is expected to maintain a military weapon in perfect working condition in his home and subject to fines if he does not comply. Still today, every bridge and every tunnel in the country is mined.

We know everyone has heard of the infamous "anonymous bank accounts" which existed until 1992. The Swiss believe you are personally responsible for your actions and have strict laws to insure that consideration. As long as you follow them you are free to do whatever you want. If you want to risk your life and swim across Lake Lucerne, nobody is going to bother you. But, nobody has any responsibility to save you either in case you start to drown.

As we arrive in Lucerne and our hotel, the Schweinzerhof just a Michael Jackson was leaving in his stretch limousine. For what it was worth, several of us got to see him as he drove away and waved his gloved hand out to the window to one lonely admirer - his photographer. There wasn't a single fan present, including most of those on our bus. I was ambivalent as to how to interpret what we saw. Was it "just due" for a sad commentary on the American Entertainment Industry or did was this departure just a well-kept secret. We could only wish for the former.



It was raining after we checked in, so we grabbed an umbrella and headed out. Our first stop was the Chapel Bridge. Built in 1333, the footbridge was 560 feet long, crossed the river diagonally. It was one of the best-preserved wooden bridges in Switzerland. Since it was covered we could keep dry while watching people, busily moving about in the streets, and swans, carelessly swimming about in the Reuss River.

Dodging raindrops, we ventured a few blocks into Old Town and found another dry spot under an awning of a street pub in the

Weinmarket square. With samples of the local brew, we just sat back, relaxed as other tour groups walk past us. Huddling under umbrellas, they listened to their guides explain the multi-colored artistic work on the building facades and the decorative wrought iron signs hanging just a few feet above the narrow streets.

At mid afternoon Shelly had her special treat ready - the Black Forest Cherry cake with coffee. Starting at the bottom, there was a moist piecrust soaked in a cherry brandy. Next there were three layers of a brown German chocolate cake, not the dark heavy type common in the states, but a light fluffy variety. Each half-inch layer of cake was frosted with an airy whipped cream. And, for the final regalement, across the top were cherries in a brandied sauce. Naturally one piece was inadequate for most of us.

Unfortunately, Shelley caught some flack for her improvisation from another Tauck tour director also in our hotel. Her people didn't get cake and complained. Shelley modified our itinerary in order to get our ladies into Lucerne before the stores closed for the weekend and in the process she provided us with an afternoon treat. The thirty-five of us gave her a "lot of points" for this "heads up" change.



At 5:05PM the bells of Hofkirche (Church of St. Leodegar), two blocks from our hotel, starting ringing beckoning worshipers to the evening service. Built in 1640, it was the most important church of Lucerne and was named after its patron saint. A group of us joined the locals for their evening service. The hour long mass seemed identical to the American version, except it was all in the German. And those uncover hardwood kneelers, they were a penance that could permanently cripple you.

That evening, dinner at the Hotel was a three and a half-hour affair. Knowing Tauck was paying and being able to order whatever we wanted, we had no intentions of leaving anything in the kitchen, but a sink full of dishes. We had bottles of wine, the appetizers, entrees, and deserts. Besides that, the food was outstanding.

Again, morning came so quick the sky never have time to clear. Preliminarily, we planned to ride the cog train to peak of Mount Pilatus, but the weather was countermanding our intentions. In counsel we gathered outside the front door of the hotel and examined the ominous sky. The rule was that if you couldn't see Mount Pilatus, don't go. Well, we couldn't see it, but the overcast sky did seem to be clearing. Optimistically and unanimously we proclaimed, "What the hell! Let's go!"

A couple of blocks from our hotel, Tauck had a boat chartered for us on Lake Lucerne. We boarded, met our new guide, Bob, and headed for the mountains. Miraculously, the moment our first foot hit the deck, the sky started to clear. We had the best day thus far. The Catholics who went to mass at St. Leodegar claimed credit, but we knew better.

During fifteen-minute journey across Lake Lucerne to the base of Mount Pilatus, Bob told us a little about the countryside and a little about himself. He was an American who married a Swiss citizen ten years ago. They relocated here to the small family farm. In Switzerland farmland was very precious and difficult to get. It sold by the square yard rather than the acre and often cost as much as two and a half million dollars an acre. Even then, you could not build on farmland without permission from the government.



From Lake Lucern, we sailed into Alpnacher See and disembarked at Alpnachstad at the base of Mount Pilatus. Here a cog train, the steepest in the world with a 55% incline at some spots, waited to take us seven thousand feet up the side of the mountain. When we boarded the train, the temperature had warmed up nicely to near seventy; when got off at the peak, there was three inches of snow everywhere. It was cold, but the view was spectacular. In gaps between the clouds below us, we could see for hundreds of miles in all directions. The below freezing temperate kept almost everyone in hotel Kulm trying to stay warm, while one lonely soul ventured out

and hiked the remaining hundred feet to the peak.

The return trip to Lucerne was via cable car on the side of the mountain opposite the cog train. First, in a forty-passenger gondola and then, in a four-passenger car, we had an unobstructed aerial view of valleys, with little villages of a few hundred alpine homes and shops; of mountains, with snow capped peaks; and of lakes, with reflections of the blue skies dotted with billowy clouds. The terminus was at Kriens, where our bus returned us to the hotel. The whole excursion took about four hours.

Nothing specific was scheduled for the afternoon. Some did walking tours of the old town, visiting the thirty-foot high stonewall fortifications that surrounding the city, the dark brown, covered wooden bridges, the old city squares with their medieval painted facades, and the half dozen 13'th through 16'th century churches. Others just relaxed with a beer under a street umbrella along the Reuss River, imbibing in the pleasures of the sun and observing life as it strolled past.



As dusk approached, a dozen churches announced the culmination of the day with a medley of bells, echoing off the surrounding mountains. Like song birds wantonly calling for a mate, one bell tower seemed to signal to a distant tower. The plea sounded back and forth until the entire city erupted in chorus. What a unique sound - appreciated only by a few people like myself, who just happened to be in their hotel room with all windows wide open, typing a journal and attempting vainly to assimilate the spectacle that is Switzerland.

Tonight was party time. Tauck invited us to dinner at the Swiss Chalet Restaurant just on the outskirts of Lucerne. We were having a cook out, well maybe a cook in. Each table seated eight and had a hot plate/oven combination, which we used to melt cheese and fry weiswurz and other sausages. As we prepared our food, the wine flowed, and the accordion or piano music rang out. In authentic Swiss attire Papa and a couple of mamas (not to be confused with the Mamas and Papas) yodeled folk melodies, played a tune with cow bells, and made a Sears and Roebuck handsaw sound like a Stradivarius.



Unfortunately, Shelly knew the "Gang of Thirty Five" too well. They had already demonstrated their ability to party hardy. She knew we had every intention to break the record for wine consumption. So, boo! She cut our party short (lost a lot of points) and loaded us on the bus while we were reasonably coherent and self-propelled.

On the ride back to the hotel Susan tried to organize an impromptu

"sing along", but we were in Switzerland and had to be independent. Back of the bus would never cooperate with the front of the bus. Even when we attempted to sing the same song, it wasn't the same verse. Not having access to the microphone on the bus, she couldn't get "this act on the same page". Shelly wasn't going to give it to her and relinquish what little control she had left.

Early in the morning and under overcast skies again, we were driving east to the Appenzel Valley, to St. Gallen, and eventually to Lindau, an island city in Lake Constance (aka Bodensee). Bernd took our bus down the back roads. Looking out the right side of the bus, we could see the two to three thousand foot high foothills of the Alps. Every so often there would be a gap in them and we could see in the distance the white caps of the much taller Alps themselves.

In 1880 when Mark Twain toured this area of Europe he sarcastically described Switzerland as enormous pile of rocks with a dark green carpet stretched tightly over the top. That was a reasonable accurate representation. As if on display on little shelves or on lumps in an enormous "putt-putt" golf course, there would be a small village, a church, a wayside chapel or farmhouse, all of them with white stucco siding, with chocolate or ginger brown framing and with slate or clay tile roof. Every window had colorful shutters and a flower box overflowing with red, yellow, and blue blossoms. Everything seemed too neat and orderly, too picturesque, as if the entire country was a Hollywood set auditioning itself for the next movie extravaganza. Around every bend we expected to see Heide yelling for grandpa or Maria twirling and singing "The Hills are Alive".



The Abbey of St Gallen was famous for its library, which was one of the oldest in the Western World. On display were some of the oldest books ever produced in Germany. We saw well-preserved originals of handwritten manuscripts dating back to 760AD. Many were colorfully decorated with margins of intricate lacy patterns or gilded in gold leaf. We could imagine ages ago cloistered monks in candlelight painstakingly penning each letter.

The book room, which we visited, was constructed between 1758 and 1767 as a reading room and a repository for the Benedictine monks. Two stories high and fifty feet wide by hundred and fifty feet long, the books were neatly stacked on shelves behind locked glass doors. The ceiling was covered with Baroque images of the period and adorned with Rococo carved wood cornices. The floor was the original parquet wood. In order not to mar it, we were required to wear slippers of carpet over our shoes.



We lunched in Appenzel at the Hotel Santis. Afterward we roamed the streets of this little town, dodging raindrops that managed to find their way back on top of our holiday. Appenzel was famous for a breed of dog. One of our neighbors collected little dog figurines and we wanted to get her one. However, we searched and found nothing. We did get to see several Appenzels. They stood two-foot high at the shoulders, had two-inch long black and dark brown hair with a splash of white on the snout and bib. They weren't nearly as attractive as the St Bernard unofficially associated with anything Swiss.

Probably no much larger than one square mile in size, Lindau was on

an island in Lake Constance. It was connected to the mainland by a bridge a couple of city blocks in length. Some travelers described it as one of the most romantic cities in Germany. In all honestly, we were not able to determine why. Except for a few old Roman fortification, which remained as small sections of a wall here and there, the buildings were primarily of 18'th and 19'th century construction.

In the evening while everyone was either in the dining room or in the lounge of our shore side hotel, the Bayerischerhof, a few of us did slip away and walked out along the causeway leading to the Lion Monument. Here, we sat quietly in the dark, at the lion's feet, across from the lighthouse listening only to the splash of the water against the break wall, and staring at the anonymous dots of light on the Swiss mountainside, a mile from us across the lake. Like sparkling jewels they rose up from the shoreline and into the sky, melting randomly into the clouds.

On our drive to Munich the next day, we made a brief visit to the Chapel of Ottobeuren.

It was a notable contrast to the churches we had previously visited. Nearly all the other cathedrals were in an east-west direction. This one was built facing north-south, putting its windows on the east-west side. Whereas, the interiors of the former were always dark and somewhat dreary, Ottobeuren was bathed in sunlight. First, we entered as small dark lobby. When we opened the door into the nave, we were overwhelmed with the brightness. That was symbolic of passing from purgatory to heaven. The imagery was augmented by near white faux marble of all the walls, statues, columns, the Rococo ornamentation, etc. However, there was no marble everything was constructed from plaster and paint to mimic marble. Painted on the white ceilings several hundred feet above us were three-dimensional Baroque scenes.

The outside of the Chapel of Ottobeuren was also an example of this faux style of construction. What appeared from a distance as stone façade was just a clever paint job on a flat concrete surface, made to look like three-dimensional stone.

At lunchtime on September 11'th, we arrived in Munich at the site of the 1972 Olympic games. We ate at the Olympiaturm, a nine-hundred foot tower with a rotating restaurant at the six-hundred foot mark. While it made a full 360-degree turn, we had a clear view for hundreds of miles of Munich and all the surrounding countryside. We saw the stadiums and Olympic Village constructed for these memorable games that were marred by the attack and murders of Israeli athletes by Islamic extremist. We had no idea how similar events just moments away, would impact our visit.



After lunch our city guide, Peter, showed us Munich's old city. Munich was the capital of the Bavaria Kingdom and had 1.3 million people of which 20% were foreigners. Originally a monastery for monks, it was established as a city in 1158 by Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxony. It was most famous for "cloister" the Hofbrauhaus and the Octoberfest, which has been held there for one-hundred and ninety years. Now for those who claimed that beer was a critical food group, the monks of Bavaria agreed. They developed it as a liquid diet to get them through the lent fasting. Munich made five thousand different versions of this "food" in nine hundred breweries. They brewed no light beer. Unfortunately, during our brief stay in Europe, we sampled only a handful of selections. Nevertheless, there wasn't a bad one in the bunch. Our favorite, however, was Gosser Stiftsbrau, a dunkel we found in Vienna and brewed in Austria. It had the molasses flavor reminiscent of imported Lowenbrau we had as kids, forty years ago.

The old part of the city was on the western bank of the Isar River. It had a number of baroque and rococo buildings constructed in the eighteenth century by the rules of Bavaria

inspired by Italian architecture. At the center of the old town was the Marienplatz and the ornate Neues Rathaus built between 1867 and 1908. It was the home of the Glockenspiel, which we latter visited. Next to it is the fifteen-century FrauenKirche, a massive late Gothic Cathedral with tower three and twenty-five foot towers. Nearby the original gates to the city, the Sendlinger Gate and the Isar Gate, built in the early fourteenth century, were still standing. Heavily damaged during the Second World War, much of it was reconstructed.

At 3:30PM Munich time or 9:30AM Eastern Standard Time we walked into our hotel, the Arabella Sheraton Westpark. As we exited the bus we were cheerfully planning our excursion to the Hofbrauhaus and an evening of merriment. Shelley handed out the room keys on the bus and we headed to our rooms. As we walked past the lounge area, I glanced at the TV. The banners scrolling across the bottom and the image of the Pentagon caught my eye. Everyone else went directly to the elevators. After I got the gist of what was happening, I went to the elevator as the last to enter and said, "They bombed the Pentagon." There were gasps of disbelief. It seemed to suck the very essence of life from us, starting with the hollow ache in the stomach and culminating with a numbing of every nerve.

Not only had the clouds darkened the skies of our trip, but the extra-ordinary events unfolding in New York and Washington had added an almost unimaginable element. With my alarming, almost incredulous announcement in the elevator, everyone rushed to their rooms and remained there transfixed by the surreal images of the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Were we viewing a cruel Orwellian prank?

We rapidly changed channels trying to verify it wasn't a joke. The event totally dominated every European station. No one knew what to expect or how to comprehend these events. America, an icon of world security, proved surprisingly vulnerable; obviously they were concerned about their potential susceptibility. Our thoughts, like every rational world citizen, endlessly cycling from total disbelief, to fear, to anger, to sorrow, and back to disbelief.

We cancelled our party at the Hofbrauhaus and every one solemnly walked to the Catholic church for a moment of shared shock and empathy for those innocents who were sacrificed in the insanity. The priest tending the altar offered his condolences and read a prayer from his missal the best he could, in German.

We spent the evening in our rooms trying to get whatever news we could. The only English information was from the European version of CNN, MSNBC, or BBC. We could see the sympathy and solidarity of the world as it lined in support of the United States. Nobody was really quite sure what to say or what to do. It was truly an awkward moment both for Americans and those we met. But, they started with small expressions of condolence, such as canceling all music at the Hofbrauhaus, in respect for the tragedy in America, when we where there the following day. Then it expanded to more organized events, such as what Rod and Mary experienced in a Catholic Church in downtown Munich.

They were touring the church, when a passerby told them they were having a special service for the Americans and would they like to attend. The priest led approximately five hundred people in a German prayer. Then the church went quiet. In the background the organ started softly playing the "Star Spangled Banner" and gradually increased in volume. They saw many of the participants openly crying. Rod and Mary said, "it was the most emotionally moving experience we ever had." A Munich television crew that was covering the prayer session interviewed Mary.



On Thursday night we watched the changing of the guard outside Buckingham Palace on BBC. The music was the "Star Spangled Banner," and not the British national anthem. The otherwise stoic Brits were shown sobbing in openly. The announcer said that this attack was the worst ever experience by Britain. Every day we witnessed in Germany and Austria some special tribute to America.

original reservations.

With this ostentatious expression of support from almost every nation of the world, we never felt at risk. We weren't sure when we would get home. But, we still had one week on our tour and expected that the airlines would be flying again by then. Shelley was already working with Tauck to provide us with a place to stay in Vienna should our presumption be incorrect. By Saturday international airlines were flying again and on Sunday Shelley had confirmed that only one couple would not be able to return to the United States on their

Prior to these dramatic events, as we toured this part of the world, the commonality of all nations was evident in everything we saw. The European stores bore the same names as those in the States. The products in the Munich windows looked no different from those in Chicago. European Union movement had opened all the borders. We drove past abandoned the passport check stations. People moved freely between countries much like they did between California and Texas. Until the attack on New York, it seemed the entire population of earth was moving toward a single citizenship.



The following day was our free day in Munich. After being dropped at Maxmillianplatz, we walked to Marianplatz and stood in pouring rain, watching the 11AM performance of the Glockenspiel. On two little stages there were portrayals by the forty-two dancing figures. On the upper level, knights on horseback jostled re-enacting a 1568 wedding ceremony. At the lower level, figures danced celebrating their survival of the 1517 plague. At the end of the ten-minute operation, the rooster in the pinnacle crowed three times reminiscent of Peter's denial of Jesus after his crucifixion.

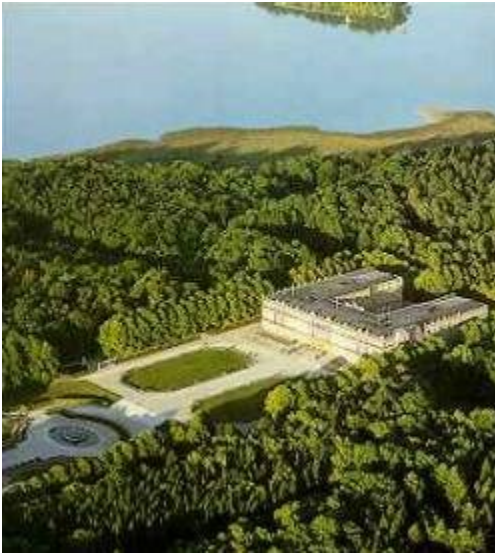
The ladies headed to the shopping district and the guys for the Hofbrauhaus. Although we planned to do more, the rain made roaming Munich just too uncomfortable. Anyway we planned to break the four-liter record, Shelley reported for her prior tour. It proved not be a challenge. We coasted through four liters without breaking a sweat. Before we had time to order our fifth liter, the ladies joined us and put a stop to our contest.

Like the countryside between Lindau and Munich, the eight-seven miles southeast to Salzburg was flat and boring. On the way we visited Herrenchiemsee on an island in the largest Bavarian lakes, Lake Chiemsee. It was one of the four palaces or castles built by the Fairy Tale King, Ludwig II, who was more that eccentric. Besides having an unimaginable fetish for King Louie XIV of France whom he almost worshipped, he was a total recluse. This building was a monument to that peculiarity and his insane extravagance. Most of the rooms, including the spectacular "Hall of Mirrors" were duplicates of the Palace of Versailles, down to a copy of many of its paintings.

We boarded a ferry in Prien. When we landed, a horse drawn carriage met our boat and took us to the

Palace. Although planned for eighty rooms, it was never completed. Ludwig ran out of money after only 20 rooms. That also was quite a feat. He managed to exhaust the family fortune, accumulated over six hundred years, in less than twenty years.

Sophie, a short twenty-something blonde, was our guide. At 10AM she stopped her monologue and with her chin trembling in emotion she said softly, "It is now a moment of silence for all German people in remembrance for the losses in America. Please join with me." For several minutes all of Germany came to a halt – no vehicles moved, the country was quiet. We saw reports on BBC that similar activities were occurring all around Europe.



Before getting back on the road to Salzburg, we had lunch at the Malerwinkel Café and Restaurant on the banks of Lake Chiemsee.

Salzburg lied in a valley from which towered the wooden slopes of the Salzburg Alps. The steep sides of the Monchsberg, rocky and rugged, rose from the midst of the town. In the ancient cemetery of Saint Peter, the vaults were hewn in rocky clefts. Many of the scenes from the "Sound of Music" were shot there. On top was the old castle. To get a fantastic view of the city and tour the remains of the old fortification, we hiked about a half-mile up the side of the cliff on switchback roads. For less energetic you can take the venicula.

There was much history contained in one square mile of the Old Town. Many of the private and public buildings were 17'th and 18'th century marble structures suggestive of Italian influence. It was not only the birthplace of Amedeus Mozart, it was also a center for classical music. It was the most visited city in middle Europe, hosting nearly eight million annually. To the delight of the women, who roamed dozens of narrow streets looking for the perfect souvenir, there were hundreds of little shops and open-air markets crammed in every corner.

When we arrived at our hotel, the Sacher, two local guides were waiting to show us around the city. Our guide, Austrian Annalisa, started her presentation with a statement of condolence to all the people of America. She expressed how important the American people have been to Austria, specifically through the Marshall Plan and "Care" packages, which people of her generation still remember. Her meals as a child came from those "Care" packages. We appreciated her comments.



We left our hotel and walked across a footbridge over the Salzbach River directly behind us. Our first stop was the birthplace of Mozart. From here we walked to music hall which was used as the site of the Salzburg Folk Music Festival in the Sound of Music. About fifty feet from the back door was the Abbey of St. Peter. As we walked around visiting the historical buildings in Old Town Salzburg, a long Black flags hung from many of them. Sixty years ago those flags displayed the Nazi swastika. On the day of our visit they were just black, three feet wide and twenty feet long.

Annalisa ended our walk in front of the Franciscan Church where the Bishop was leading the parishioners in a prayer meeting for the losses in America. Many of us participated in the service, sitting right up front only a few feet from the Bishop.

His sermon was very animated, but we had no idea what he was saying. Later yet learned he was preaching a pacifist message.

On the following day we drove east into the Salzkammergut region. With nine lakes in valleys of nine-thousand foot mountains, this region of Austria and was very scenic and known as the "Austrian Switzerland". We drove to Bad Ischl, just to the east of Salzburg, and toured the Kaiservilla. It was a hunting lodge, about the size of a large American house and Emperor Franz Joseph official summer home. He and Elizabeth, known to the family as Sisi, took up residence in it in 1854. He loved to hunt and mounted a trophy of every Shamois he shot. There were hundreds of them. Almost every square inch of wall space had a plaque with a bleached-white skull bone about eight inches long and a set of black horns about a half inch in diameter and eight inches long. In 1914 it was in this villa that Franz Joseph signed the Declaration of War setting the stage for the two major World Wars.

We returned along roads cut into the edge of the mountains at the edge of the Attersee and the Mondsee and lunched at the Hotel Krone. It was a block from the parish church of St. Michael, where the wedding scene for the "Sound of Music" was shot. Naturally, after eating everyone walked down to the church.

After dinner at the hotel that evening, we walked over to Maribell Palace for a two-hour long chamber music concert, featuring violin soloist Luz Leskowitz. We sat on folding chairs in the ornate, white marble ballroom with its fifty-foot high ceiling and listened to renditions from Mozart, Bartok, Haydn, and Dvorak.

All aboard! At 9AM we were standing at the railroad station waiting to board our train for a ride to Vienna. We had seven first-class cabins in car 23. With six people per room, we relaxed, ate our "sack lunch", and exhausted all the champagne in the club car making Formosas. There wasn't anything of interest to see outside on our three-hour ride. Most of us read, while others walked up and down the walkway of the car trying to startup a sing along. Some of the ladies got a little wound up. A group of eight of them marched through the train station in Vienna singing "God Bless America". They turned a few heads, but not much more.

Bernd had already arrived with our taxi and our local tour guide. As we drove along the Ringstrasse to our hotel, the Bristol, we got a short description of what we were seeing. Shelley handed out maps of the old city, gave us our room assignments, and told the ladies where the shopping district was. Since the stores were not going to be open on the following day, Sunday, Shelley again conspired with the women to get them into town a few hours before they closed.

Our rooms were large and very luxurious and right at the edge of Old Vienna. Across the street and just outside our window was the Opera House. A few blocks from that was the Museum district and in the opposite direction was Karntner Strasse, a pedestrian only street, where all the stores were. We couldn't have asked for a better location to stay. If we got stranded in Europe, we would have been delighted to stay here, but at five hundred dollars a night, we doubted if our travel insurance would have covered it.

Again we had no time to spare. We still had to get those last minute souvenirs for family and friends back home. Karntner Strasse started one block from our hotel and ran three blocks to St. Stephens Cathedral, made a hard left and looped around for a half dozen more blocks, before turning again back to our hotel. Being Saturday evening the streets were full of pedestrians and a street performer on every corner, playing violins, singing some operatic melody, miming some statue, or giving a marionette show. Umbrella tents were setup every where as makeshift coffee houses or wine gardens. While the ladies frantically ducked into every store trying to find that perfect remembrance, the men sat patiently at a table in the street drinking a glass of beer and admiring the passing scenery. By the way leather was in!

Dinner that evening was on our own. Whereas, the concierge make reservation for everyone at some fancy Vienna restaurant, the Tennessee contingent had about all the super fancy food they could handle. The extra pounds, almost ten for many of us, were becoming apparent. We were looking for "light and simple". In the absence of a "meat and three" or a catfish stand, we settled for pizza at a tiny little restaurant we found tucked into a back road a couple of blocks from St. Stephens.

In the morning our guide met us again and we headed for Schonbrunn Palace. Originally a hunting lodge of Maxmillian II in the 16'th century, it was continuously expanded by the Habsburgs over the next two centuries into an opulent palace in the style of France's Versailles. French Style gardens were added at the end of the 17'th century and Maria Teresa converted it to a palace at the end of the eighteenth century.



Latter that morning we walked through the museum district of Vienna while our guide explained what we were visiting. By this time most of us were "vacationed out". Our interest shifted to the question of whether we were going to get home. Shelley confirmed all planes were flying as originally ticketed. Only one couple had their flights cancelled. In the afternoon we walked down the street to an Internet Café, ordered a couple of glasses of wine, and e-mailed everyone back in the States, "we were coming home."

We had our farewell party in a private dining room in the Bristol. During diner several groups of our new friends got up and entertained the others. We had a rendition of the yodeling cow followed by the goat act, we had some songs couple of other groups, a Hawaiian farewell song from Shelley, and least important, a performance by Terry and the Eight Fraus of "Was ist dis mein dear". A good thing for Terry and the Fraus, the audience only threw their napkins, they had already removed the utensils.

We got to the airport several hours early anticipating all kinds of delays due to added security measures. We were given a list of all the things that we could no longer have in our carry on bags. We expected the worst, but our experience was just the opposite. There were no delays and we noticed few added security measures. About the only thing out of the ordinary was the added body scan in the Frankfort airport and increased searches of carry on bags.

In the Vienna airport six men of middle-eastern descent boarded our plane. They huddled together in the corner before boarding and were the attention of every other passenger. We had already made our plan if they dared get up while we were in flight – three of us were going to pick up Terry Kelly and throw him at them. Fortunately, for Terry they slept the entire trip. Aside from that, the flight home was peaceful and without incident.

GLUEKLICH FERIEIN

It was September 11 as we sat in the Olympiad Tower restaurant, five hundred feet over the city of Munich, Germany. As it rotated a full 360 degrees, we got a great view for hundreds of miles. A little over fifty years ago, most of what we now gazed upon, laid in ruin, resulting from the most horrific event that the insanity of a few assailed upon the many. As our observation point turned, the 1972 Olympic Village came into view. It was here, only twenty years ago, that again the madness of a dozen zealots held the world hostage as they murdered innocent Israeli athletes. We thought how much had changed.

Ten years ago the Berlin Wall was dismantled; the two Germanys, the last vestige of an ideology gone berserk, unified, and in doing so, symbolized civilization's maturation to participate as citizens of a shared planet rather than of individual nations. As we traversed Europe, the abandoned passport checkpoints at borders extolled this conjunction. No way did we conceive that the irrationality of a few maniacs would once again incarcerate the spirit of humanity. But, our whole perspective changed as we entered our Munich Hotel and on a television caught site of the flames and smoke erupting from the Pentagon.

Far from home we sat in our rooms transfixed and hypnotized by surrealistic images on small glass screens. Our thoughts ran the gambit as our emotions cycled from panic, to fear, to sorrow, to anger. After an hour of having been nearly anesthetized by the immobilizing pictures of the World Trade Center, we joined with other friends in the lobby to share concerns. But, there were only blank, agonized stares, no words. The silence everyone was screaming was deafening.

Shelley, our tour director, took charge and led the thirty-five of us to the nearest church. It was like funeral procession as we quietly walked three blocks to St. Peters Catholic Church. The route we took was virtually abandoned by other pedestrians, so we moved in our own self-contemplation, without having to acknowledge the presence of strangers. En masse we moved to front of the church and filled the pews. Still there was not a sound.

After about thirty minutes a priest, whose was tending the altar, walked over to us and interrupted the stillness. In his limited English he offered words of sorrow for the circumstance and read an appropriate German prayer from his missal. Few of us knew what he was saying, but we appreciated the consideration. Nevertheless, his sincere attempt to empathize with our misfortune made us realize that although we were on foreign soil, we were not in a foreign land. That was an epiphany!

We had one more week in Germany and Austria. We did not know when we would be allowed to return home. But, as we continued our visit, each of our hosts recognized our discomfort and in a respectful manner did what they could to ameliorate. We had a young Austrian tour guide nearly cry as she announced her country's national moment of silence in honor of America. In Salzburg a much older Annalisa reminisced about her experiences after the war and how her family was eternally grateful for the generosity of Americans exemplified by the Marshall plan and how they survived on "Care" packages. Looking into her eyes, we sensed that Annalisa was expressing for all of Europe, "it is time for us to give something back."

Many people have told us that it was too bad this event occurred during our European trip. However, we disagree. Anybody can bring back souvenirs and pictures of their vacation. Instead we were able to bring back something of Europe that few get to experience. Believe us when we say, "there is a big difference in hearing about how others feel about your country versus living it." We were very fortunate to have been there,



rather than get the media's self-serving interpretation.

So with this holiday season, we like to share this remarkably optimistic prospect that needed a tragedy to put into focus. Never before has the humanity been so united. Never before could we be so sure that in time of serious trouble that we could count on our family and friends.

We wish everyone all the pleasures of the season.