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Students discover

Travel was a real learning experience

SUNDAY, JUNE 21, did come finally. Last minute packing and work projects made the day pass quickly. Just time left to hug the collie, leave last minute instructions for the friend, who is house and dog sitting, load luggage and family into the station wagon—and go. We are off on a month's adventure.

First border to cross, our good neighbor to the north. No problem. Soon we are greeting other members of our party at the Windsor Airport. Everyone's passport and luggage are in order. Right on schedule—Nordair Flight No. 738 wings off toward Montreal. John Wesley College—Travel Study, summer of 1975 is under way.

Our first clue this was not another domestic flight was having all messages from the stewardess given first in English, then in French.

In Montreal it was first made evident just how much the students were responsible for themselves. Each carried his own passport and ticket. There was a mad scramble to catch the shuttle to our next plane. After a tense moment, the last two students did show up, and we were off again. This time to Brussels.

At 11:00 p.m. U.S.A. time, all but reading lights, were turned out. Pillows and blankets were passed around. Time to sleep. In just two hours—1 a.m. U.S.A. time, but 7 a.m. Belgium time, the last thing any of us wanted was food. But here it came. Breakfast. Now, serving breakfast and having the sun come up may have fooled my stomach and head, but my body knew better. Jet lag set in. It was impossible not to envy the students. They were laughing and jolly; it was a lark for their younger bodies.

BRUSSELS AIRPORT and everyone confirming his own ticket to Vienna. Three hours to wait and no Belgium money. As one girl said, "I've never carried more money in my life, and it is not worth a cent, or more accurately, not worth a franc." Also noted, were three soldiers carrying sub-machine guns. It lightened the grip on my children's hands.

High noon found us on a Bulgarian airline. No more English messages here. Everything the stewardess spoke remained a mystery to our group. Only one case of air sickness, my son's friend, Mike, and he has perked up. The John Wesley College group, consisting of the professor in charge, Dr. Norman Bonner, his wife Gertrude, Joane Sullivan, Rene Orians, Dan Ellens, Joyce Cherry, Denise Norberg, Terry Conine, Donna Voelker, my husband Charles, our children, Todd, Andrea, and Brian, and friend Mike Sullivan are about to discover Vienna. Do I hear a waltz?

A footnote about the stewardesses on the Bulgarian airline—one student felt they looked sad—could be a comment on life in a Communist country—or our own keen imagination.

At last, Vienna. For the first time, it was necessary to show passports. The trip past customs was fast and uneventful. Greeting us with broad smiles and comforting calmness, were two staff members of John Wesley College, Herb Bursch and Tim Young. They keep the Ungers in good repair, have incredible knowledge about Central Europe, some handy language skills, and endless information on public transportation. A half hour after landing, we were loaded in two Ungers and on our way to the first campsite.

Riding down the street we saw a mother pull her little girl's panties down and the child relieved herself in the gutter. The child's clothes were adjusted and they continued up the street. Is this a common Viennese custom or maybe another tourist with their own customs? We don't know yet.

IT WAS A JOY to get to what would be our home on wheels for a month. Everyone unpacked and settled in the Ungers. Beginning provisions were in each unit. Due to the size of our units, they weren't moved often after once being parked. Walking was back in style. Those responsible for dinner in their unit that evening began looking for a grocery store. What an experience.

Pooled information comes out like this: take your own grocery bag or buy one, and bag food yourself. Eggs are not refrigerated. Milk is sold in flimsy plastic bags. American foods, with German instructions, such as Kraft spaghetti dinner, with no way to understand how to prepare it. Fresh vegetables are very dirty and not washed as in the U.S.A. Everything is in smaller size containers. The metric system is in action. Is one kilo of hamburger enough for six people? And there is the ever present communication problem and money exchange.

Prices were terrible. As much as twice the amount normal in America. My favorite overheard comment was, "Did you ever know chickens had toenails?"—Ascribing to the fact that poultry is sold feathers off, head and feet on—and also that at least one of our students was a "city girl."

My own family gave me a break. Our first night we ate in a Braun Garden. That had its exciting moments, too. No one could read the menu. Finally, the children decided probably ausburger was German for hamburger and ordered that. They were wrong. It was a hotly spiced, onion flavored meat. Water is not served with meals, and it left us all with hot mouths. A glass of coke costs about 63 cents American equivilant, so all the desired liquid was not available. Most of the shortages here seem to relate to wood or energy problems. Thus, paper products and hot water were in short supply.

AT OUR CAMPSITE, hot showers were available for a fee. No soap or towels are furnished in the bathrooms. Something else that took some adjusting to, was no toilet tissue, either. Soon we all took our walks with the necessary paper, soap, and towels in hand and not the slightest blush to our faces. Is this what is meant by a liberal education? Excitement had faded to fatigue from the youngest to the oldest. Beds were welcomed. Morning brought more surprises. The public transportation was explained, and written instructions given out to insure our return to camp that evening. Then we were set out on our own.

At the tram station, Charles purchased tickets for the six in our party. First, one for Andrea, who is 11, and she pushed the button and got on the tram, while the other tickets were being passed out. As the rest of us reached to push the button again—the tram pulled out.

It would be impossible to explain my feelings watching the tram pull away with my little daughter aboard. She had no Austrian money and spoke no German. The old men at the station, who seemed to gather there for a social time, gave all kinds of advise, but I couldn't understand it. In ten long minutes, the next tram arrived. It was decided I should wait there, and Charles would check out the stations on the route. Mentally, I sent Andrea messages like: Remember, keep calm. Don't be frightened. Daddy is coming. In the longest 45 minutes ever, and after six trams had passed, Andrea and her daddy pulled into the station.

It seems an old Austrian understood her problem, but spoke no English, and a young English-speaking Austrian together helped her. She was told to get off and wait on the platform where she could be seen. Her daddy found her three stations away and in much calmer condition than her mother.

I must say, my fears for Andrea were not the same as they would have been if this had happened in downtown Detroit. For some reason, Vienna seems very secure. People are walking the streets even after dark. They seem friendly, frugal, and culturally rich. They value beauty. Flowers are everywhere. The streets are clean. Many Bavarian costumes mixed with other cultural attires, make people-watching interesting.

THE CITY OF VIENNA is magnificent. Winding streets, statuary, horse-drawn carriages, fast little cars, buildings of undescribable intricacies, and a history of rich tradition, are interwoven so as to capture the heart. The people are proud and durable. Vienna was once the capital of the Hapsburg empires. It is now the capital of a rather prosperous Austrian Republic. There are many imperial markers and reminders of the past. Many incredibly beautiful Renaissances, baroque and rocco buildings delight the tourists; while the background of the Alps and the famous Danube River are of importance to others.

The Vienna Boy's Choir sings each Sunday in the chapel of the Imperial Palace. The 2,000 room residence of Emperor Franz Josef and Empress Elizabeth is an available tour. While being escorted through the palace, one in our group asked where were their thrones. The very proud guide replied "Franz Josef was a general—a soldier—thrones are all right for England, but not for an Austrian Emperor. He stands—he was a general."

The Spanish Riding Academy, home of the Lipizzanes horses, perform on Sundays only, but each morning is a practice session; it is an unforgettable two hours.

Vienna has many shops and sidewalk cafes. The aroma of hot dark breads, flowers, and cheese make Vienna a treat to all the senses. I believe I could live happily in Vienna forever, but as with all good things, that must end.

Early the next morning, we were loaded and off to Salzburg. We had only one stop: Mauthausen. Only those of us, who were older or with knowledge of World War II history, knew what was ahead.

SNUGGLED IN THE most beautiful of places, between Vienna and Salzburg is Mathausen. It was a concentration camp in World War II. Study guides were passed out here. It directs the students attention "not to the stone walls, the fences, the gas chambers, the crematorium, or the picture museum, rather the critical problem raised is—What is the nature of man that he will build and allow to be built such places?"

Nothing prepared us for what we were to see. There were the awful gray, damp, depressing buildings and the wide court where once parked Nazi tanks. The rooms had small wooden beds, and primitive tables and chairs, where the rationed food was served. To see the firing squad wall, and picture-after-picture of actual victims—was all too much. One could still feel the pain, hear the moaning, sense the despair.

One picture showed mothers holding their children, both stripped of clothing, dignity, and hope, standing innocently, waiting to be gassed. Somehow, I had managed to this point, but in the next room was an orderly display of little shoes, removed from children prior to their execution. Remembering my own protected little ones and how their tiny shoes were wrapped and carefully put away, and then seeing small shoes of helpless children on their way to death was too much. With hot tears stinging my eyes, I stumbled out of the building into the air.

When I could look around, I saw students—some alone with heads down, others holding hands, and still other seeming to manage, at least on the surface. They were also outside in the sun. Each trying in his own way to digest the horror of it all. I looked up to the Bavarian Alps and the 121st Psalm came to mind: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my strength. My strength cometh from the Lord." I felt comforted. I hope those innocent victims knew Psalm 121, and somehow, too, felt some comfort.

IN A FEW MINUTES I went on to the last building. I was glad I did. There were pictures taken of our American troops liberating the prisoners and many memorials. This was written on a piece of paper and discovered after the Americans came: "—God bless our Native Land. May heaven's protecting hand, Still guard our shores. May peace her power extend, Foe be transformed to friend. And Britain's rights depend on war—no more!"

And—"To my friend Tojck—with wishes for the speedy recovery from the calamities of War." 6-14-1944.—John Alarter. In the midst of all this horror, there had been hope.

The last building before leaving is a chapel with a memorial terrace and plaques dedicated to each faith and from each country who suffered here. A chapel has never been more appropriately placed. The students would like to to forget today, but they never will, niether will I—not ever.

Hills man takes wine seriously

By SUSAN AVERILL

He does not consider himself an expert, but after four years of tasting wines, Dr. Alden Leib of Farmington Hills considers himself at least a connoisseur.

Leib is a charter member of a wine-tasting club which he and a Detroit wine-shop owner friend formed more than four years ago.

When his friend, Frank Lewis, owner of L and L Wines in Detroit, approached him with the idea of the club, Leib said he was interested. Most of his experience with wines came when he was an officer in Germany, with access to an officer's club where German wines were frequently enjoyed.

To some, it might smack of chauvinism, but Leib and Lewis decided in the beginning that women would not be allowed to attend club meetings.

IT'S NOT THAT they are misogynists. But they believed that a woman's presence might derail their attention from a serious appreciation of wine.

"We wanted it to be serious, not an excuse for socializing. Wine-tasting groups have become sort of a fad. If we brought dates or wives, we might not learn as much of the history or the background of the wine," Leib explained.

Wine-tasting groups have become faddish, he said, and are often arranged by wine-shop owners who are interested in promoting one or more of their own wines. Such is not Lewis' intention, he said.

To gather a group, Lewis and Leib asked friends who might be interested. Some of the friends brought friends. The result was a small conglomerate of men of diverse ages and occupations, few of whom knew each other.

Although they weren't initially homogeneous, they shared a common interest in wine-tasting. And though they want to avoid major socializing, Leib said the mood does become convivial after the first few glasses hit the stomach.

Membership in the club is expensive. Dues aren't required, but each man must contribute to the kitty from which the wines are bought. Wine prices have skyrocketed since the club's inception, causing the club to cut its meetings from once a week to every other Thursday.

"WINE HAS GONE UP like diamonds and gold. Bordeaux is out of the question; the Japanese bought most of the French wines."

Consequently, burgundy—though not a rarity—might cost $20, if the connoisseur wants a superior quality. But not all wines are expensive.

"The thing about the German wines is that they're not that expensive. You can get a very enjoyable wine for very little money. And they tend to be more consistent in quality than the French wines," Leib said.

If it weren't for Lewis and the group, Leib said that he could expect to pay $50 in a restaurant for the wines he is tasting for $20 as a member of "Les Mavins du Vin."

The group has also tasted jug wines and Michigan wines.

"If you want to do wine-tasting, you have to taste them all," Leib said. "Sometimes the taste surprises you. We had a Michigan wine that was very good."

Anonymity is the key, however. Chances are, if a taster knew what it was he was savoring, he might be biased. Avoiding this, Lewis will cover each bottle with tin foil.

The only identification on any of the five bottles they sip each session is a letter of the alphabet. Members bring five of their own glasses, lettered A through E, to correspond with the wines.

Charts are passed out, and members rate and make notes on qualities like color, appearance and bouquet (fragrance).

THE HOST FOR the evening—they alternate between each member's home—will supply bread and cheese to eat between each tasting so that the flavor and aftertaste of one wine is not carried into the next.

Members rarely agree on their ratings, which Leib said is no cause for concern.

"We rank them in order of liking. We hardly ever find people who've judged all the same." Different people have different tastes and levels of experience to account for the difference. Besides which, the flavor and bouquet of a wine will change as it warms and absorbs more oxygen, he said.

"It changes as it hits the air and warms up. That's why you should open a bottle 20 minutes before you drink it. When it's been poured, you should also shake it around in the glass so that it gets more air. That way, you get the true nose (bouquet) and taste to it."

Four years of tasting means about 200 nights, at five bottles a night...that's more than 1,000 different bottles of wine. When will it all end?

"That's what some of my friends ask me...'Are you still tasting wine? When will you be through?' You're never through. Each year, the wines will have a different taste to them.

"The German wines are fairly simple, but there's just never an end to it."

Some wines are astringent, some fragrant and heady. Some are acidic, some sugary or fruity and others taste of sulphur.

ONE OF THE relative rarities they've tasted was a German ice wine, which, Leib said, most of the members immediately tagged as superior.

"Wines went up like diamonds and gold. Bordeaux is out of the question. The Japanese bought most of the French wines."
--Dr. Alden Leib