

Hey Rich!

by

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Foreword

The story I am about to tell is true; every word of it. If I have erred in any detail or spelling of names, I fault my memory. I did have the aid of my old passport with border crossing dates stamped, my International Youth Hostel membership card, old maps, photos and postcards which I sent to my family. My mother thankfully kept them for me as souvenirs.

Now nearly fifty years later, telling this story, I'm thinking about Bob Dylan's lyrics: "How does it feel; to be on your own, like a complete unknown, like a rolling stone?" Read on....

Chapter 1

View from the Side of the Road

On the Pennsylvania Turnpike at the Howard Johnson rest area families and truckers mingle during their westward journeys. The warm summer sun was slowly sinking into the mountain trees beyond the semis and sedans. I stood there on the walkway leading to the restaurant watching a family get out of their station wagon. Opening my mouth to speak, I hesitated as the parents looked around for their kids. A red haired little boy walked stiff-legged toward his dad as his younger sister suddenly ran ahead to clutch her mom's skirt. The dad's eyes met mine as he walked by and I saw my chance. "Hi there; are you folks going west on the turnpike?" It was a stupid question because all the traffic at this rest stop could only go in one direction – west. But I enjoyed asking as I always got a curious look followed by "Ya, sure." This was my opening to appeal to their good nature and ask for a ride; for myself and my best friend Rich.

After months of hitch-hiking through most of Europe, we were tired of standing on the side of the road with a smile and an outstretched hand to attract a passing motorist. We just wanted to get back home to Minnesota quickly. The dad looked at his wife and then "Sorry, not enough room for two more." I was sure the station wagon was large enough, but then I noticed Rich standing behind me.

"Man you look rough. Take a break behind those trees."

Through most of our travels together, Rich had been the aggressive one with the lust for adventure and ideas of where to go and how to get there. But now we were back in the states in June of 1962.

Rich had the blond hair of his Swedish parents, but it was longer than most other American guys his age and his beard was more than just stubble. His leather sandals showed prominently below his bleached and tattered jeans, and his old college sweatshirt had no sleeves at all. He didn't care to compromise his choice of clothing just to get a ride home. He figured that I looked respectable enough; clean shaven, shorter hair, tall and thin, with tennis shoes, no-holes jeans and a clean T-shirt tucked in. I was willing to play the "clean cut" role, smile, speak with my clear Midwestern accent, humbly and politely, in order to get home before we ran out of money again. It would definitely be an "all-nighter", as we had no intention of finding a bed to sleep in along the way. Catch a ride, make small talk with the driver and then doze off. That was the plan to get home by the next day. We made Milwaukee in twenty four hours since leaving the docks of New Jersey, and my thoughts drifted back to a cold December two years earlier when I had accompanied Doc Bailey on his journey to an interview in Milwaukee.

This was where the seed of overseas adventure was planted in me. Bailey, the young sociology professor at Wisconsin State College-River Falls, was interviewing for a leadership position with the Experiment in International Living. Dr. Robert Benjamin Bailey III, or Doc as we all called him, arrived in River Falls in 1957. The only African-American on the faculty, he came directly from his doctorate program at Utrecht University in The Netherlands. Originally from Roanoke, Virginia, he had studied under

a Fulbright scholarship program, first for a master's degree at the University of Birmingham, England, later to Frankfurt University, Germany, and then Utrecht.

I was a tag-along to Milwaukee, having dropped out of River Falls a week before with the intention of meeting up with three other guys I knew from the Pinochle Club on campus who were in similar straights. At home in St. Paul, Dad didn't like the idea and told me how stupid he thought it was; a group of four drop-outs headed for Florida to find jobs in December. As we walked out the back door of our home on the East Side of St. Paul, a freezing wind hit me in the face.

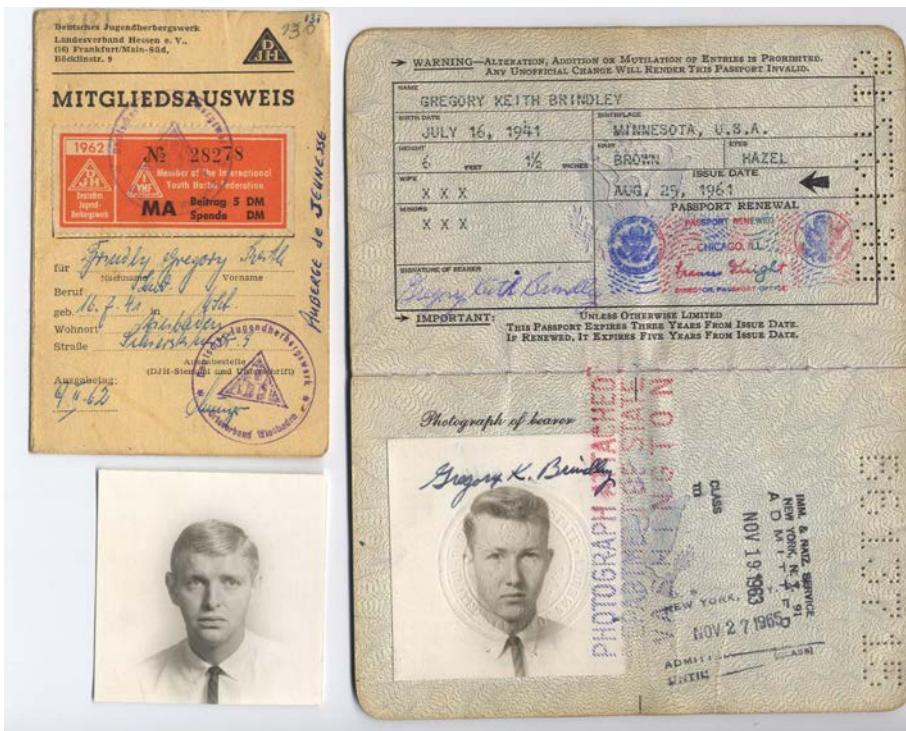
"At least it will be warmer there," was my meek response.

"And when you run out of money, you'll be calling home for a bus ticket."

"No, Dad, I'll find my own way."

Arriving in River Falls, I found only one of my three fellow travelers whose hang-down face said it all. None of them were going, after their parents had all put the kibosh on our plans. So, what was I to do? I walked over to Doc Bailey's house on Church Street and rang the doorbell. His hospitality was ever present; always an open door for students. I could stay over, but then he was leaving for the interview, unless, of course, I wanted to ride along. A side trip to Milwaukee was some consolation. At least I could tell my folks that I made it beyond River Falls. But it turned out to be more than just a face-saving side trip. That weekend together, riding in Doc's car was one continuous conversation about exploring different cultures and meeting interesting people in other countries.

"Some day you should go to Europe," he suggested – and nine months later I did.



Greg's Youth Hostel 1961-62 membership card

Greg's 1961 passport ID pages

Rich's photo used for his passport

Chapter 2

Pack the Footlocker

The summer of '61 was a blast. Though I was one year short of being a legal beer drinker, I had friends who could buy it by the case and we spent warm summer evenings at my parents' home while they were at their lake cabin up north. Friday and Saturday nights were the best for partying and we would all pitch in to tidy up the house on Sunday afternoon in preparation for my parents return. Besides that, I became quite adept at washing dishes by hand, a skill that would soon pay dividends in a way I could never have imagined.

Good friends of mine, Rich, Skud, Herbie, Nick, Wyman, and Dieter from Germany, enjoyed listening to the stereo sounds of Mel Torme and Ella Fitzgerald while smoking Marlboros, drinking bottles of Schlitz, and making bets on when Blegan's boat would be finished.

Weekend afternoons were spent helping Ron Blegan finish off the construction of his riverboat, which, after the July launch into the Mississippi River, became the top choice for weekend beer parties that lasted all night. Captain Ron never failed to find a secluded sand bar up river from St. Paul to drop anchor and party on.

Rich and I both had occasional dates with girls, but with no steady relationships to keep us in St. Paul, we were both looking for ways to travel. I paid a visit to the local Marine Corps recruiter and by August, had passed the physical exam and mental tests. I was ready to be sworn in and stationed overseas. One evening Rich came driving into my father's gas station on Payne Avenue in St. Paul, where I was changing a tire for a customer.

"I gotta talk to you right now! Doc says he found jobs for us in Germany and there's a boat leaving from New York right after Labor Day!"

"So what! I'm busy and I haven't saved much money," I complained.

"But that's no problem. Doc wrote me a long letter from Germany. He's there now and the jobs are a sure thing."

Rich returned to help me close the station for the night and over beers at Schweitz's Bar down the street, he continued to press me for agreement to go together to Germany. I was totally unprepared; no passport, no knowledge of any foreign language, and little money. The only things I knew about Germany outside of geography and history books came from another buddy, Jim LaValle, who often wrote to me when he was stationed there, in "Hell Hole Hoenfels" driving tanks for the U.S. Army.

Rich went on about how Doc's friend, Gunter Utting in Wiesbaden owned a gas station and was willing to hire us to pump gas into Volkswagens and BMWs. Wow, that wouldn't be difficult and we'd be living in another country.

Doc was still in Europe leading a group of US college students for the summer with the Experiment in International Living. He wrote Rich with details of booking the passage, getting passports and our job contact in Germany. We managed to get our passports sent to us and they arrived a few days before leaving St. Paul. I still had to face an angry Marine Corps recruiter as I backed out of the process and requested permission from the local Draft Board to be out of the country for an extended time.

For my parents it must have been a bittersweet time. Older brother Terry worked with my father, living in St. Paul with his wife, Lynn and daughter, Dianne. But younger brother Tom would soon be leaving to enter Colorado College as a freshman with a hockey scholarship. And with my planned departure, that left only my youngest brother Jim, who was still attending Johnson High School, at home.

A week later when Rich stopped by the station, I was busy with a car on the hoist and a grease gun in my hand.

“Have you decided to go?”

“Take a look in the back seat of my car,” I replied with shit-eaten grin on my face. He was back with me under the hoist in a minute.

“What are you doing with a foot locker?”

“I found it at Pedro’s Luggage store downtown; only twelve bucks, with a lock on it too. We can fit all our stuff in there and not worry about it.”

We were, both of us, long on commitment and short on cash, so Rich arranged a ride to New York with a guy named Jim who he knew was going to visit a sister out east. By the time we had it packed; the light metal foot locker weighed a ton. Hefting it by the handle on each end into the trunk of Jim’s car, I was wondering how in hell we would manage this clunker.

But never mind; we were on our way and that’s all that counted. Jim insisted on an overnight stop at his cousin’s home in Elkhart, Indiana where we slept late and started drinking beer with lunch on a sunny Saturday. We took turns driving that evening and just before Jim passed out in the back seat, with Rich behind the wheel, Jim informed us that he had changed his mind and wouldn’t be taking us all the way to New York. He was getting off the Pennsylvania Turnpike at the Washington, D.C. exit.

“Now what the hell are we going to do?” I complained to Rich. I pictured us at the side of the road, sitting on the footlocker.

Rich just gritted his teeth; “F—k him,” as he gunned the engine past the D.C. exit.

Forty miles ahead and already past midnight, we pulled up at a Howard Johnson Rest Area still on the turnpike. That’s where we found our angel. He appeared in a wheelchair headed for a ’59 Chevy convertible.

“Any chance for a ride?” I queried as I stood on the sidewalk leading from the restaurant. He looked me up and down.

“Sure thing.”

“And my friend here too?”

“OK, no problem.” He was a salesman, returning to New York City, about fifty years old with legs good enough to stand on, but not walk. As we picked up the foot locker he shook his head.

“Don’t think it will fit.” He showed us the trunk, filled to the brim with his samples, and back seat, with room for the collapsible wheelchair.

“But if you two can get it in the back seat, you’re welcome to join me.”

With Rich and the footlocker wedged into the back, I felt like a king riding up front as the headlights pierced the predawn Pennsylvania mountains.

Chapter 3

Sloan House

The hobbled salesman teased us with views of the New York skyline as we cruised along the freeway in New Jersey.

“They call this the Garden State, but you’d never know it with all this industrial wasteland we’re passing through,” he proclaimed.

We glided into the Lincoln Tunnel under the Hudson River and emerged on the quiet Sunday morning streets of midtown Manhattan. My head did a slow motion tilt until my nose pointed directly at the peaks of these man-made projectiles covered in haze. I could hardly believe that I had made it to New York City. No family California vacation this; I was stepping onto the sidewalk across 34th Street from the Sloan House YMCA with over 14 hundred rooms to accommodate young men from all over the world in search of their dreams. At 26 stories tall, it almost equaled the highest buildings in St. Paul or Minneapolis.

The salesman was more than happy to have delivered us to our destination and refused our offer of payment.

“Take care of each other now” he offered and the sleek blue gull-winged Chevy disappeared around the corner.

“Well, don’t just stand there gawking, grab hold of this thing,” Rich hollered.

It wasn’t Rich’s first New York visit and he wanted to get checked into a room. I fumbled with the plastic strap handle at one end of the footlocker and we did a herky-jerky walk across the street to the Y. The elevator to the 18th floor with its slow and jumpy movement did nothing to lessen the fear and apprehension I was feeling. It would be just the beginning of a series of events in which I’d be confronted with apprehension, excitement and fears unknown in my Midwestern upbringing.

“A perfect sauna!” Rich proclaimed as I unlocked the door to our room; a Spartan set of beds on either side of a tiny wooden table with a matching chair slid under it. “This is it! Our home for the next five days,” he continued, as he gave me a grin that read: tough it out! Lifting the sash, the window stalled with only six inches of open space for the hot humid sun-baked air to mingle with the odors left by the previous souls who occupied our space. It was by far, the smallest sleeping room I had ever seen or imagined.

We set the foot locker down with no room to spare between the beds. This metal case was packed tight with stuff we each expected to need for an unknown number of months, or even years of our journey across the Atlantic: sweaters, jeans, T-shirts, jackets, collar shirts and ties, sport coats, trench coats, tennis shoes and the most precious to us both, LP albums of artists who had entertained us at late night parties over the summer – Ray Charles, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, West Side Story and Porgy & Bess soundtracks, Dave Brubeck, Ahmad Jamal, and Andre Previn.

We slept in our underwear, on top of the wet sheets, the first of our 90/90 days in New York, when the humidity levels matched the temperature and the evening breeze gave little relief. Every day was a new adventure.

Rich returned that first morning from a walk down the hall to the dormitory style bathroom and told me to hurry and get my butt down there to see this guy who was shaving his chest.

“What!”

“Yeah, his underarms too!”

Sure enough, here was this big hulking body-builder guy with hairy arms, and even back, wiping off his cleanly shaven face and chest. At the time I could not have imagined that this handsome guy from Oregon would be responsible for getting us to the ship, docked in Hoboken, New Jersey, five days hence. He was, for me, the first of many unusual characters we encountered in our brief New York stay.

Rich claimed to be unruffled by people we met. In fact, he rather enjoyed introducing me to various men living in Greenwich Village, whom he had encountered during a stay in New York the previous spring. Most seemed to enjoy flaunting their homosexual behaviors with extravagant gestures and lots of gossipy talk about Miss (Johnny) Mathis and queen so and so. I wasn't intimidated, perhaps because Doc Bailey had instilled in me the notion of being a “participant observer” of unusual behaviors; that is, to mingle and engage in conversations with people, while holding to my own beliefs and values. I think it was the same for Rich. I rather enjoyed these guys and found their behaviors quirky and funny. They were a far cry from folks back home in the Midwest where, as Rich often proclaimed, “The men are men, and the cows love it.”

It would be years later that I realized that another guy about my age from Minnesota was on an extended journey to the Village at this time. He had already changed his name to Bob Dylan and was playing his guitar and harmonica, singing folk songs in coffee shops and cafes.

As I was the tag-a-long in this strange city, it was up to Rich to lead me around, and both of our musical interests leaned toward Jazz. Alas, most of the jazz musicians held out in joints where drinks were pricy and we were looking to make it until the boat sailed without starving. But not to worry, we had our records with us and held the optimistic idea that somewhere in Europe we would encounter a turntable to play them.

From our Sloan House “suite”, we ventured out every day in the late morning, into the middle of the garment district, finding a cheap lunch from a sidewalk vendor of frankfurters with lots of kraut and mustard (always loading up on the free condiments) before an afternoon of exploring the city. We were only a few blocks from Macy's Department Store, Madison Square Garden, and the famous Empire State Building, in which we rode the elevator to the top for a spectacular view of Manhattan. Being in the middle of the garment district meant dodging couriers; young men in blue jackets walking briskly down the street pushing a wheeled rack of newly sewn clothing, swishing from a hanging rod above.

We used subways at all hours of the day and night, then walk, walk, walk; through Central Park, into the United Nations Headquarters Building for a guided tour, to Chinatown and onto the Staten Island Ferry, which cost us five cents to cross the harbor each way, to the Museum of Modern Art, and the new Guggenheim Museum of art (what a thrill to start at the top and walk down this circular masterpiece, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright). We gawked at the new Pan Am Building which was constructed on top of Grand Central Station, and of course at the neon billboards of Times Square; my favorite being the Camel cigarette sign which featured a huge face of a man puffing on a

Camel while real smoke streamed out of a hole between his lips and drifted into the Manhattan skyline. Not being big baseball fans, it never occurred to us to locate Yankee Stadium where a duel of the century was taking place between two Yankee players; Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris, who were both close to breaking Babe Ruth's home run record of 60 in one season. Though I didn't know it then, both Roger Maris and Bob Dylan grew up in Hibbing, Minnesota.

I loved the music of popular Broadway shows, and thought about seeing Camelot with Julie Andrews, which was listed in New Yorker Magazine that week, but our limited funds were not to be replenished as expected. Back in St. Paul, my old pal Skud hadn't been paid yet after a month-long layoff from his job as a cement mason. Well-tanned and muscular; when he worked, he made more money than I ever had, but when he was laid off, he was always hurting, which was why I had loaned him fifty dollars a few months ago. His promise to repay me had evaporated before we left, but he was sure he could wire the money to me in New York. Two dollars wasted on a phone call brought a new promise – he would wire the fifty to me at the Rotterdam American Express. This news, on the day before our boat sailed, really threw me, and I decided to give up the trip.

“What!” Rich was incredulous. “Money or not, I'm goin'!”

The fact that together we had less than ten dollars and needed a taxi to the pier in Hoboken, New Jersey didn't faze him. Undaunted, he convinced me that we could share the taxi with the guys from Oregon who we had met at the Y and were booked on the same SS Groote Beer.

We hailed a cab for the four of us and proceeded to the Lincoln Tunnel, where we crossed under the Hudson River to Hoboken. Lucky for us, one of the guys was Wayne, “Mr. Shaven Chest”, who, we gave the last of our cash to and who took charge of paying the driver the fare plus a “handsome” fifty cent tip upon our arrival at the pier. The cabby was incensed, but could do little to intimidate this guy from Oregon with the physique of a championship body-builder. Checking in our foot locker, we presented our one-way tickets to the Holland-America Lines attendant and walked up the gang plank.

Chapter 4

SS Groote Beer

The excitement of being on an ocean-going ship for the first time was tempered by the pit in my stomach of being flat broke. Sure, our tickets provided a bed to sleep in and three meals a day, but how would we live without cigarettes, or worse, sit in the ship's bar without a beer in front of us? As we slipped smoothly down the Hudson River into New York harbor, leaning on the rail at the back of the ship, Rich tapped the arm of a guy next to him.

“Got a smoke? And one for my buddy?”

As if we had just left our cigarette packs in our cabin, he passed us two Pall Malls. Confidently whipping out my Zippo, I used it to tap down the tobacco inside the king-sized paper and then flicked the lid open. I thumped the flint wheel, flashed a spark and held the flame under Rich's, then mine. The first drag off the first bummed cigarette on our way across the Atlantic felt exhilarating. Doing something few of my friends would dare left me with an edgy thrill, enhanced by the nicotine in my veins. We stood on the deck, feeling the breeze in our faces as we glided past the Statue of Liberty.

I noticed lots of young men and women about our age, some of whom had been waving to friends and family, well-wishers on the dock as the tug boats had pushed and pulled us into the Hudson. That Rich and I had no one to wave us good-bye left me feeling empowered; that we were off to sea without a college program, faculty guide, or pre-arranged study program to rely on – no, we were on our own, free as a hungry bird in search of new horizons. Save a few Sloan House Oregonians, every face was a stranger to us, though much like us, either Americans venturing out, or Europeans returning home to their northern Euro roots, overwhelmingly white.

As the last vestiges of land disappeared over the horizon, for the first time we were surrounded entirely by the blue Atlantic waves, gentle rollers bathed in sunshine. The ship, smaller than the luxury liners of its day, churned steady as a rock as we surveyed the polished wooden decks, sturdy iron railings heavily coated with layers of white paint, and a single smoke stack sporting broad horizontal stripes of blue, white and red, imitating the Dutch flag, puffing a black plume from diesel engines below.

Our cabin was small, with a round porthole view of the ocean, upper and lower berths for sleeping and some drawers and hangers for clothes. The ship's porter informed us that the foot locker would have to be stowed on a deck below and that we would be taking our meals at table number 12 in the dining room during the B sitting.

Lucky for us, we had a roommate from Vermont who was taken by our tale of woe and loaned us each ten dollars. With tax-free prices for beer (10 cents a glass) and cigarettes (15 cents a pack) we were set for the entire ten day voyage. The Vermonter was about our age and agreed to take the chance of getting his money back when we landed in Rotterdam. That is, if our buddy Skud came through with the fifty bucks he promised to send to me, care of the American Express office.

Though I eventually made five Atlantic crossings by boat, that first voyage was the most exhilarating. By the second day, thick clouds had replaced the sunshine and on

deck, shorts and tank tops became jeans and sweaters as we relaxed in chairs with a good book to read. I discovered a daily posting by the ship's captain on world news and weather in the North Atlantic. Dag Hammarskjold had died in a plane crash while on a peace mission to the Congo. The U.N. would now have an inexperienced Secretary General. President Kennedy sent condolences. The weather report contained a note of not less than three active hurricanes in the mid Atlantic, headed in a northerly direction. Oh yes, that's toward our ship although the report noted a movement "harmlessly out to sea."

A gentle rocking motion, side to side and more slowly front to back felt serene and peaceful as I sat on deck, allowing my eyes to drift from the pages of a paperback to the magnificent blue water, tipped with the whitest foam. My peaceful moments were interrupted by several blasts of a deep throated horn, followed by an announcement in three languages that all passengers should return to our cabins, take out a floatation vest and report to our designated life boat on deck. Though none of the lifeboats were lowered from their secured positions, they appeared seaworthy and the scene of life jacketed passengers reminded me of the Titanic. I comforted myself with the idea that icebergs were unlikely to be floating in the sea lanes in September.

The third evening at sea found us beyond the continental shelf and into the deep North Atlantic. The offshoot of the hurricane force winds had reached us and we were battered with ten to twelve foot waves into the side of our small vessel. Having been built about twenty five years prior, our SS Groote Beer was about as long as a football field, but was without the benefit of newer designs in ocean liners, namely stabilizing blades running the length of the hull to keep them from swaying.

We had the pleasure of sitting in the ship's bar, a nice sized enclosed area on the upper most rear deck with a small dance floor and café style booth seating next to four feet tall oval windows on each side. As the vessel yawed with our side up, we would, for one moment, have a view through the windows on the far side of nothing but the vivid blue waters, followed by a shudder. And then the entire ship yawed, and we found ourselves on the down side, looking across the dance floor at nothing but a gray, cloud filled sky. The Dutch bartender seemed totally amused as we staggered, wide legged to the bar for another round of draft beer. The rolling action resulted in more foam than liquid coming out of his tap, but he attacked each glass with a plastic straight edge, scraping the foam off, over and over, until at last only the top third remained a thick bubbly white. I rather enjoyed watching this ritual and soon came to savor the foamy brew as much as I did a chocolate malted milk from the corner drug store back in St. Paul when I was a kid.

The following evening brought not only strong winds, but rain. Rich and I decided after a few foamy brews to go exploring. Out on the side deck with no moon or stars, we had only the light from the bridge above where we trusted the captain or his mate was guiding us through the rough seas. Crawling over a metal gate past the "off limits" sign and down the metal stairs, we found ourselves on the main deck at the bow of the ship. Not wanting to be seen, or swept overboard, we crawled along to the foremost railing and sticking our heads through the rails, viewed the magnificent movement of steel, slicing into the dark waters, sheets of white spewing out to the side as the hull rose and fell with a crash of water over our heads.

From there we cautiously moved to the rear of the ship where some loose wicker deck chairs were skittering across the slick wooden deck. A few other brave souls were out there, enjoying the drama of being tossed about like a cork and among them was our generous cabin mate. He looked well suited to the elements wearing what appeared to be a fisherman's raincoat. It beat the hell out of our sweatshirts and jackets, which by now were beginning to soak through.

"Let's go for a ride!" he bellowed as he picked up a wicker chair, took a few quick steps and caught the downward pitch of the ship's roll. Swooshing across the deck, he landed against a pile of empty chairs. Rich and I joined the Vermonter for a few brief slides until he sailed into a wooden bench up against the guard rail. As his chair careened sideways and slammed into the bench, his body popped up like a yo-yo and he had to grab the post extending above the rail to keep from falling overboard into the black sea.

"OK, I'm done!" I hollered to them and slowly made my way inside, heading for the cabin and dry clothes.

One nice advantage to our ship being a chartered student voyage was having only one class of passengers. No first class, off limits, fancy dress dining events for us. There was only one dining room with about twenty tables and we were assigned either A, B or C seating. When our seating was announced, we would join fellow travelers sitting in eight chairs on two sides of a long wooden, rectangular table. Everything was served to us individually by male waiters, most of whom were Dutch and fluent English speakers. We had plenty of time to get acquainted with our table mates between servings of appetizers, main courses, and always dessert with coffee. Rich and I were seated with two guys and two girls from a private college in California, along with two German guys who were returning to their University studies in Munich after a summer touring the U.S. I was fascinated by the waiters' maneuvering in and out of the kitchen with huge metal trays filled with food, as the ship rolled side to side with an ever changing slanted deck, requiring them to constantly adjust their bodies to remain vertical.

The most entertaining meals for me were during the days when the sea was at its rolling peak. The dining tables, securely fastened to the floor, now had the added features of guard rails clamped to the edges and dampened table cloths to keep silverware and dishes from sliding off the edge. Each individual chair now was secured with a metal spring and clipped to the deck to keep it from tipping over. More than once I had to use both hands to grip the table to avoid falling out of my chair. I soon learned to eat with my feet planted in a wide stance with the continual side to side rolling deck under me.

The waiters actually had an easier time of it as half the passengers did not show up, apparently to sick to eat anything. My stomach was right in tune with the sea and I always kept a good appetite, although the portions were reduced, especially liquids like soup, which sloshed from one side of my bowl to the other as the waiter ladled it out of his serving pot.

It was during the nights when the winds howled and the sea tossed us about that I convinced myself that the captain and his crew must know how to handle this ship, no matter the weather, and I could relax by reading a book, chatting in the bar, or watching the evening movie. This was an adventure by itself, as the ship's theater was below deck in the bow. The action there was not only rocking side to side, but up and down as well. I managed one forgettable movie before walking to the rear deck to get some air. Here I encountered another interesting feature of our vessel, for as the bow plunged down, the

aft rose, enough that the propellers driving us forward were now in shallow water and the entire rear section would shake and vibrate until the bow rose and the aft plunged into deeper water.

Evening of the eighth day at sea under continuous clouds brought excitement on deck as passengers were pointing off the port bow toward twinkling lights along the horizon. We were now abreast of Lands End on the southwest shore of England, with street lamps and vehicle lights shrouded in a foggy mist. The following morning we docked in Southampton and stayed long enough for travelers to disembark on their journey to the British Isles. That evening was the final party for many more who planned to end their voyage at LeHarve, France the next day. For Rich and I the journey ended on the tenth day, September 18, 1961, as we tied up to the dock in sunny Rotterdam, Holland.

Chapter 5

Foreign Lands

I took the sparkling sunshine, with stark billowing white clouds against a bright blue sky, as a good omen. The Rotterdam harbor was built along the banks of the Rhein River as it empties into the North Sea. Tall sturdy wooden docks were backed by three story brick houses and shops. From the wide upper windows, huge, puffy white sheets, comforters really, hung out to air in the sun. The excitement of arrival was mixed with the tension of not knowing whether the American Express office would have a check in the mail for me.

Tottering down the gang plank, it took a few moments to adjust to walking on a solid, flat surface with no tilting in any direction. The wider stance “sea gait” gave way to a straight line foot shuffle as we made our way through the Netherlands Immigration and Customs officials. We had already stashed our durable, casual hitch-hiking clothes into one small suitcase so we could check the footlocker into Holland American Lines warehouse. With Rich and our cabin mate right behind me, I made my way through the docking terminal to an information booth where the attendant, in perfect English, gave us directions and drew a line on a city map indicating the streetcar that would take us to American Express. The streetcar we boarded was nothing like the ones I remembered from my boyhood in St. Paul. This was a sleek new model, so long that it had two parts, hinged in the middle with accordion type folding sides to allow passage on narrow streets and tight turns.

“Any mail for me?” I handed my passport to the clerk who returned it with an airmail letter postmarked St. Paul, Minnesota, USA. Skudlark came through with a cashable money order for fifty US dollars and a short note about his new job. Cashing it into dollars, I laid a twenty on the palm of the surprised but grateful Vermonter who was out the door in a flash with a holler over his shoulder “Good luck, you guys!” The duration of our journey, be it two months or two years would depend greatly on our ability to sustain ourselves.

“So Rich, here we are with twenty bucks and some Dutch guilders between us, and jobs in Wiesbaden.”

“Hell with that! Let’s go see Snead up in Denmark first.”

Another jolt of anxiety hit me in the gut. But Rich had gotten us this far on his ability to get people to help us. My instinct was gradually shifting toward trusting him and his ideas of what to do next. We both had a fairly good knowledge of European geography compared to most Americans on the ship, but hitch-hiking required details of roads and towns along the way. So we picked up a Netherlands road map and plotted our course, then got more detailed directions about how to get to the outskirts of Rotterdam from the English speaking AmEx clerk. As we walked down the street toward the local city bus stop, I spotted some guys we had met on the ship, seated on the second floor by a large restaurant window with white table cloths. I elbowed Rich and pointed up there.

“I wonder if we’ll ever be eating in a nice place like that?”

“Who knows...maybe? If we find someone who’ll pick up the tab?”

It made me realize that this journey of ours would be different than most American travelers and that I needed to focus on the special experiences and people, not the luxuries I was missing out on.

Starting in the Netherlands was great as most young or middle aged people spoke English fluently. We had learned a few Dutch phrases on the ship and were eager to try them out. But alas, our stammering attempts were met with good natured chuckles, followed by “Englander?” And then, “Ah, Americans! How long have you been in Holland? Just today! Welcome!”

We managed our city bus and by mid afternoon arrived at the end of the line, a mere quarter mile walk to the highway leading east. Taking care to not stand in the special bicycle lanes, we put on our best friendly American faces and stuck out our thumbs. Inside of twenty minutes we were riding on the two lane highway in a small sedan made in England. Our driver made a point of telling us he would never buy a German car. This middle aged Dutch guy was a teenager during the German occupation of the Netherlands and the horrific bombing of Rotterdam by the Luftwaffe.

It brought home to me the realization that World War II ended only sixteen years before our arrival here and I thought about how I was just a little boy when my uncle returned home from a POW camp in Germany, only to die of heart failure at his 82nd Airborne Army base. For our driver and millions of other Europeans, it was a first hand experience. But for me, this was a new era; a new time to try for international understanding, by trying to get along with and learn from people who are different from me.

We got as far as the town of Apeldorn that first day and after a good night’s rest at a small hotel, found another ride with a Dutch guy headed for Breman, Germany. The border crossing was accomplished quickly and without hassle as we drove up to the checkpoint, showed our passports and were on our way down German highway 213 into Nordhorn and headed for Breman.

Like much of Germany, this road was being upgraded to handle the increase of automobile and truck traffic. This I understood, but as we journeyed from town to town, I was mystified by seeing so many signs with arrows toward the town of “Umlitung”, but we never got to see it. Finally I asked Rich what he thought and he burst out laughing, gave me an elbow in my side and said “detour, stupid”. Before dropping us off, the driver helped us find a small inexpensive hotel and a bank to change our few dollars and Dutch guilders into German marks.

We were up early the next morning, eager to get back on the road. After a “Continental breakfast”, consisting of coffee and hard rolls with strawberry jam at the hotel, we got directions about which local bus would connect with the Autobahn, the name for limited access, express highways in Germany. Our map indicated it was already completed to Hamburg and we were hoping to get beyond it in one ride. It took two rides to get that far, and the first was with a young German couple in their Volkswagen bug. As they dropped us off, the smiling young lady wished us well with the remark in German, “Gute reise und gute fahrt”. We found ourselves chuckling at the side of the road and I remarked to Rich, “I can still see that cute young lady wishing us to have a “good fart”.

Hamburg was like most German cities, which by then had autobahn routes skirting around them, but our driver lived there and thus we found ourselves let out at a

huge traffic circle. On the other side, we stood near the signs for the autobahn entrance leading to Denmark. But we weren't the only hitch-hikers out that day. Competition was fierce. There were a dozen other young men and women looking for rides at the same autobahn entrance and here the guys coupled with girls were the first to move on.

"Here's a happy thought." I motioned to Rich as we read a note scratched in English on the back of a wooden post; "2 days at this post and no ride 3/15/61". Now we had to get serious if we didn't want to waste our time standing at the side of the road, smelling the stench of diesel fumes from the trucks, large and small that took advantage of this lower priced fuel. Perhaps it was the sunny afternoon, but I like to think it was our smiling, young, confident faces that attracted a driver to stop. I had remarked to Rich that it only takes one driver to get us out of here. This guy was going to Denmark where most roads were two lane highways, improving our chances of attracting the next ride.

A day and a half later we arrived at the coastal town of Esbjerg and phoned the number Rich had for Page Snead, the dentist from New York who was now beginning his career by working for the Danish government health department in a public school. Esbjerg is a fairly large, old fishing village with many modern brick buildings and neatly paved streets. Snead lived in part of a brick, two story duplex with the other half occupied by his landlady, Mrs. Hedegaard, an elderly Danish widow. He was overjoyed to share his foreign living experience with us on first meeting, insisting we stay with him for a few weeks. Given that he worked regular hours on school days at an elementary school, we would have only weekends and evenings to enjoy each other's company. We explained how our money predicament would only allow a couple of days stay and then hitching rides south to Wiesbaden. Snead generously offered not only a stay in his home, but to pay our expenses of food, a weekend in Copenhagen and train tickets to Weisbaden. It was an offer too good to refuse and we ended up staying two weeks. I think Rich was really glad to postpone our inevitable fate of working to support ourselves, and I was still wide eyed about being in foreign lands.

The first weekend Snead closed his dental office early and hailed a taxi to the train station just in time to board the Copenhagen bound express. Clickity clack, we were off, my first time on a European train was a magic carpet ride, whizzing past villages with neat, clean, orderly brick homes and gardens, on steel girded bridges over canals and creeks and across the flat farmland.

Copenhagen struck me immediately as an old city, unlike Rotterdam, which was quite modern, having been rebuilt after the wartime bombing. Here the church steeples of green aged copper stood out above the brick four story buildings nestled along narrow streets. In the harbor area, a small sculpted statue of the Little Mermaid honors the story by local author Hans Christian Andersen. None of these charming sights were recorded by us on film as neither Rich nor I had yet purchased a camera. Visits to museums, architecturally interesting churches and even a meal at a restaurant with white tablecloths (what a treat) were Snead's way of showing us one of his favorite cities. We were introduced to "cellar cooled" beer and enjoyed a bottle of Carlsburg, poured into a glass with a great foaming head. No more ice cold drinks or even ice cubes for us. We also observed the European custom of eating with a fork using only the left hand; the right used only for knife or spoon. No more switching the fork left to right and back again while cutting meat.

Back in Esbjerg, Snead convinced me that I should get some free dental work done. Several of my molars had small fillings which were cracking and needed replacement. Being a recent graduate of his New York dental school, he was enthusiastic about the latest preventive treatment technique called “prophylactic dentistry”. This involved a proactive approach to cavities by removing huge middle sections of every molar, and placing huge metal fillings inside. He forgot to mention that weeks of sore teeth and years of sensitivity to heat and cold would follow. It reminded me that one of life’s lessons is taking the bitter with the sweet.

Snead turned out to be a fairly good cook and most days we would walk over to his school office and together, (he didn’t have need of a car) walk to nearby shops to pick out fresh vegetables, beef or best of all, fish, brought in that day from an ocean catch. We helped with some preparation, but mostly he did the cooking while we did the clean up chores.

One evening he introduced us to two of his young Danish lady friends. Rich and I were wide eyed to be in the company of such pretty girls, about our age, with blond hair and blue eyes. Not a date really, but the five of us enjoyed dining at a small café and conversing in English, sharing experiences of growing up Scandinavian, but in different countries. Both of Rich’s parents were Swedish and three out of four of my grandparents were too. Rich, being an Anderson, we learned that the Danes spell it with a ‘sen’ ending. The next weekend Snead promised some entertainment and we went by taxi to a restaurant featuring an after dinner cabaret. The audience, seated at small tables, was mostly middle aged local folks with some elderly men and women, all nicely dressed, a rather conservative lot. Rich and I had our best and only sweaters on, Snead with a white shirt and tie under his sweater. The performance consisted of what appeared to be local talent; a singer and piano player, juggler, comedian who was pretty funny, judging by the laughter and though we understood none of it, applauded along with the Danes. But the finale was absolutely amazing, unlike any performance I had, or would, ever see again.

A lovely young woman was dressed in a man’s suit, put on backwards, complete with a man’s hat pulled down over the face. As she danced, she turned her back to us so we only saw the front of the “man” while her arms appeared to be draped over his shoulders as if they were a couple dancing. Slowly she began taking off articles of clothing until there she was, turning around however briefly to reveal her nude body with only a G string left on. It was shocking to me that the audience applause was the same as for the other musical entertainers. The naked human body was accepted as a natural thing of beauty. Back home in Minnesota, the only nude striptease acts were performed in dimly lit downtown Minneapolis bars with an audience of men, mostly drunk. I had once managed to see a performance as an under aged twenty year old with a fake ID and a few older friends. Here in Denmark, as I all of Europe, no ID was necessary since family influence and community norms were enough to keep young people from abusing alcohol.

During our stay, Snead gave us lessons in washing clothes since, as he explained, Europeans do have small electric powered washing machines, but do frequent washing of clothing by hand. He proceeded to demonstrate with a portable wash board, (a wavy metal piece of sheet metal enclosed by a wooded frame) and a bar of laundry soap inside a tub of water. This turned out to be a valuable lesson as coin laundromats were hard to find in Europe and would be a drain on our meager funds. I learned to wash my clothes,

a few pieces at a time and let them dry on hangers inside when an outside clothes line was not available.

We thoroughly enjoyed Snead's company and I believe he enjoyed ours. He really helped us to get acquainted with living outside the USA. His final favor was to purchase train tickets for us, direct to Wiesbaden, West Germany. The trip was relaxing and uneventful as I took in the scenery of flat farmland everywhere, animals grazing, farmers in tractors harvesting their crops at the end of the growing season. It gave me an edgy, excited feeling as I recalled similar scenes in the Midwest back home, but realized that I really was in a foreign land, far from home and family, headed for work where I didn't speak the language, and of course, close to running out of money. Rich and I were content to avoid the dining car on the train as we knew the menu would be expensive, and instead, bought hard rolls, fruit and cheese from cart venders at station stops along the way.

We enjoyed the comfort of second class coach seating in compartments with a nice view out large windows from upholstered bench seats. The benches were facing each other with room for three or four adults on each and were ideal for engaging in interesting conversations (or eavesdropping, when English was spoken). In our compartment, most passengers were German, headed for Hamburg and I recall their amused smiles as I asked the Danish and German border officials for a stamp in my passport. I'm sure my request seemed silly, as all the officials did was to quickly inspect passports and return them to the travelers. For me, it was a free souvenir.

Chapter 6

Tankstelle Utting

Nestled in a hilly area near the low lying Taunus Mountains, Wiesbaden is a charming, small German city, relatively untouched by the bombings of World War II. It lies just west of Frankfurt am Main (the Main River distinguishes it from another Frankfurt in what was then East Germany). Its nearest neighbor to the south is the smaller city of Mainz (which was then celebrating 1000 years of existence) along the point where the Main River flows in the larger Rhein. Our train pulled slowly into the covered Wiesbaden Hauptbahnhof and we stepped out onto a platform filled with German speaking people of all ages. Making our way through the old stone building, we found a desk below an Information sign.

“Do you speak English?” Rich inquired of the middle aged woman at the desk.

“Yes, of course; how may I help you?”

We soon got the essential location of a public phone, the American Express and some inexpensive hotels. By days end we had picked up mail at AmEx, exchanged the last of our dollars for German marks (four marks to a dollar), checked into a small hotel and phoned Gunter Utting about starting work.

Gunter was a friend of Doc Bailey’s from his graduate studies in Holland and Germany. The Fritz Utting Benzin Company was founded by his father years ago, but now young Gunter was running it. Tankstelle Utting, or U-Tank as it was called, was a small oil business, much like my father’s back in St. Paul. (The Brindley Oil Company consisted of trucks delivering home heating oil and a full service gas station.) Gunter had recently overseen the design and construction of this modern gas station, oil delivery and auto repair shop. Its bright lights and huge permanent canopy covered two islands of pumps dispensing benzin (gasoline), in grades of regular and super high octane, and diesel fuel. It was, as all filling stations were in the states at that time, a full service operation. I was put to work immediately pumping gas, checking oil and tire pressure, and cleaning vehicle windows. When finished, I walked into the cashier’s counter, reported the number of liters pumped and the cost in marks for the customer. Fortunately the cashier and a couple of fellow attendants spoke some English as I was only then beginning to learn German. Soon I would greet a customer with “Full maken?”, and “Benzin order diezel?” without another attendant shadowing me.

I enjoyed fueling the different types of vehicles that rolled in for service. The most common was the bug shaped Volkswagen with its air cooled engine in the rear and fuel tank in the front. Lifting the front hood, I would unscrew the cap and pump regular gas directly into the tank. The older models didn’t even have a fuel gauge. When the driver ran out of gas, he or she simply flipped a lever inside the car to activate a small reserve tank. I serviced many models of Mercedes, BMW and Audi cars and trucks. Most of the taxis were Mercedes with diesel engines. The trucks were mostly delivery vans and nearly all were diesel powered.

I was a few weeks into this gas pumping venture when my confidence overtook me and I was called into Gunter’s office to explain how I had managed to fill the tank of

a diesel burning van with regular gasoline. He accepted my humble apology and commitment to carefully check with customers about what type of fuel they needed. He explained that his repair men would be making the necessary adjustments and replacement of damaged parts to this customer's engine, draining and refilling the tank and compensating him for his inconvenience. I got off with the admonishment to never let it happen again. It didn't.

My fellow attendants were all local men and our uniform consisted of green denim coveralls which we zipped up over our own clothes. Thus, I was able to wear my casual clothes, most often, jeans and a sweatshirt with T shirts added in layers as the fall season turned cooler. These guys were all friendly and helpful to me, and as they spoke little or no English, were eager for me to learn German. One of the first words I remember was "langsam", the meaning of which was demonstrated on my first day of work. As I hurried across the driveway to help a customer, I felt a firm hand on my shoulder, slowing my pace, and heard "Langsam, Greg!" in my ear. I quickly realized that my jump and hustle style of service was out of sync with these German workers and settled into a slow and steady pace, always getting the job done, but not making others appear to be slackers. I learned to respect these guys as I realized they were limited in their schooling, all could read and write, but had been deselected from University studies by their education system of rigorous testing in order to continue.

I felt accepted, in part because there was little competition for jobs. West Germany was in the midst of what was called the "werkshaft wunder" or economic miracle, with full employment and thousands of workers imported, mostly from the south of Europe to do all manor of manual labor. The Economics Minister of the Bundesrepublik Deutschland at that time was Ludvick Erhard, known as "Der Diche" or the fat one, who later was elected Chancellor to replace Conrad Adenauer, then known as "Der Alte" or the old one.

I became a buddy to one of my co workers named Erik. He often invited me to supper at his home with his wife, who was a good cook. I took several Sunday afternoon walks with them and their dog to enjoy the city parks. We shared the same need for being frugal with our pay checks and instead of bar hopping, he often took some bottled Beck's bier to their apartment to share with "mich und meine frau" (me and my wife) and friends. Erick often introduced me as "meine freund Grrreg", which made me feel comfortable, even though I could understand little of their conversations. With his limited English, he did his best to keep me abreast of their chatter, but often I just relaxed and let them enjoy their talk. I was satisfied to be in the company of folks who accepted me for who I was; a young foreigner, exploring their country while understanding only a few words of their language.

Wiesbaden was a small city and that made it easy to explore on foot. One evening Rich and I stopped in a small Guesthaus for a glass of beer and supper. The waitress was sweet, always asking us if we wanted "kleines oder grosses bier?" I usually ordered a small glass as it afforded me a delicious foam head on top of the golden tap brew. Later I'd order another with more delicious foam to savor. With each glass, she kept a tab by leaving a check mark with her pen on my paper coaster. The coasters were usually printed with the logo of a brewery and collecting a few different ones made for some free souvenirs. It was at this café where I tasted bratwurst for the first time, browned on a grill and served with hot mustard and a fresh baked hard crust roll on the

side. It was a popular downtown place and there, we met other Americans, GIs as they called themselves, who were in the US Air Force stationed at the nearby Wiesbaden Air Base.

Amazingly, we also ran into the guys from Oregon who we had met at Sloan House in New York and had crossed the Atlantic together. They had found jobs at the Officer's Club on the air base. Several times a day, the Air Force ran a shuttle bus connecting off base housing for families with the many military facilities in the area. These blue painted U.S. school buses made it easy for Rich and me to visit the Oregon guys since the German drivers assumed we were military GIs in off duty civilian clothes and never asked for an ID.

While I was enjoying my daily twenty minute walk to Tankstelle Utting, evenings back at the hotel with Rich were depressing. He was really unhappy with the job he had. It was arranged by Gunter with his friend who owned a small building construction company. As an unskilled laborer, Rich was at the bottom of the heap, being a new guy and a foreigner who spoke little German. As we talked about it, he quipped "So how would you like carrying a load of bricks on your shoulder, up a ladder all day?"

He was a "go-fer" guy who was expected to fetch tools and supplies for the skilled carpenters and brick layers. He found it to be a dirty, uninteresting job, (except that he could drink beer with lunch) with the same low pay that I was getting; two marks or about 50 US cents per hour. Pooling our pay, we had enough to pay the rent, one week at a time. With no kitchen, we shared a double sized bed and used the bathroom down the hall with other tenants. The room itself was drab and depressing. We did manage to eat simple foods, bringing bread, sliced sausages, cheese, milk and fresh fruit back to the room.

"You eat, I'll starve" was a phrase I often heard from Rich whenever I talked about food or the lack of it. While I was focused on basic survival (if my first paycheck hadn't been handed to me on a Friday morning, I would have gone without lunch; I was flat broke) Rich was in Europe for adventure, and his job just didn't cut it. He quit!

Then, after weeks of listening to his complaining, he burst into our hotel room all smiles. He had found a new job that held all the excitement and adventure he craved. He was now "Encyclopedia Man", selling sets of Encyclopedia Americana to American military families stationed in Germany. This new job required him to travel with a team of sales personnel to visit the numerous U.S. military (mainly Army and Air Force) bases throughout West Germany.

The Cold War Era was on the brink of becoming a hot one. The separation of Germany into zones of occupation, controlled by the four powers at the end of World War II left Britain, France and the US on the west side and the USSR on the east. Berlin was also divided, at that time by a barbed wire fence with military checkpoints for crossing. That week the German newspapers were full of photos showing US and Soviet tanks facing each other in Berlin with the headline "Panzer vs. Panzer". I had just picked up an international edition of Time Magazine with a cover story of the military stand off. We used it to our advantage, showing it to our landlord, with a lie about how we had to leave for the US now, because we were being drafted into the army. We had originally agreed to a three month lease with weekly payments, but with Rich leaving, I couldn't afford the rent. The landlord gave in to our story and we pack our bags, including the footlocker, which I arranged to keep at my German friend's place for a while.

With Erik's help I was able to locate the Wiesbaden Youth Hostel and made it my temporary home. My membership card listed November 9, 1961 and for a mere five Deutsch marks I had a one year membership good for any country. Youth hostels were very popular in many European countries as they offered cheap lodging for young people who were traveling by foot, bicycle or any other means. For a small nightly fee, they provided dormitory style sleeping arrangements, usually in a large room with many cots set up, and separate rooms for women. A small kitchen was always available for cooking and everybody shared the cleaning duties. However, the hostel manager made it clear to me that long term lodging was not allowed.

By now I was feeling confident in my ability to not only survive without Rich as a partner, but to make decisions that I would be proud of. Enjoying my time with friends one evening, I suddenly remembered the youth hostel regulation about the gate being locked at 10 pm. Arriving too late, I decided not to bring attention to myself by ringing the bell and asking to be let in. Walking around the fence, I found a place where it wasn't topped by barbed wire, (or broken glass chips as were often found on top of stone walls) and made a successful jump.



Top: Tankstelle Utting in Wiesbaden

Left: Greg's apartment at Schiersteiner Strasse 9

Right: Utting co-worker and friend Erik with Greg in a Wiesbaden park

Chapter 7

Schiersteiner Strasse #9

My search for a cheap place to live through the coming winter months ended at Schiersteiner Strasse #9; three flights of stairs up to the apartment of Frau Shumacher and a sub-let bedroom with my own balcony. She spoke little English, but enough for us to agree on the rent, cheap enough that I could pay a month in advance. She was a retired widow who explained that I would be able to use her bathroom and kitchen, but had to purchase my own food and sacks of coal to burn in a small stove to heat my room. I wasn't very good at lighting the fire and as the temperature turned to below freezing on many winter nights; it would take about two hours to warm the room, with a ten foot high ceiling and wide glass doors opening to the balcony. The bed was comfortable and I slept well under the fluffy down blanket encased in a huge sheet that Frau Shumacher provided. I was given keys for the building entrance and her apartment which, like many European locks, consisted of a dead bolt which could be turned once with a key to engage it, or with two turns, it provided a more secure bolting.

Though I usually ate out with buddies from the tankstelle, on Sundays my dear landlady would cook a nice dinner that I was often invited to share with her. I thoroughly enjoyed her German home style cooking, small portions of pork or beef with a nice gravy or sauce over noodles or potatoes, with a green vegetable, and fresh hard crusted rolls. She followed it with a sweet dessert of bread pudding or cake and strong black coffee. Though we were not able to communicate much, I enjoyed her hospitality and think she appreciated my companionship and good appetite. As months passed and winter set in, I would see less of her with my hours of work increasing as a result of finding a different job inside a warm, dry hotel.

Chapter 8

General von Steuben Hotel

One evening in late November, as I was enjoying a beer and bratwurst at a neighborhood guesthaus, I struck up a conversation with a couple of GIs about the military facilities in and around Wiesbaden. I learned that not only was there a US Air Force base outside of town, but the Lindsey Air Station, which served as headquarters for all US Air Force in Europe, the Amelia Erhart Hospital serving all US military personnel and the place that my German friends called the “American Hotel”. This turned out to be a hotel for visiting Air Force officers and their families and was named the General von Steuben in honor of the man who came to the aid of George Washington during the Revolutionary War. One of the beer drinking GIs explained that he worked there part-time washing dishes whenever he was off duty from the air base. This sounded interesting to me as the weather was turning colder and I was still pumping gas out in the elements.

About a week later I arrived at my room, cold and wet, in spite of my handy German collapsible umbrella and decided it was time to find an indoor job. The next day I put on a white shirt, tie, dress pants and trench coat, and walked into the lobby of the von Steuben to inquire about kitchen work. I was directed to walk outside to the rear workers’ entrance and ask for Herr Munsch, the head chef.

Munsch was a no-nonsense manager of all the dinning facilities in the hotel who was willing to hire me if I were flexible with my hours. This condition was fine with me and we agreed on an hourly wage of 75 cents per hour paid weekly in US currency with no increase for overtime hours but meal breaks with all the food I could eat included. Wow! A warm place to work, more hourly pay and free food made this job perfect for the coming winter months.

Rich and I had agreed to work at least through February and save as much money as we could to carry us through a spring time of traveling. I started at the hotel the following week, just in time for the busy Christmas party season with the opportunity to work extra evening hours.

Returning to Tankstelle Utting, I informed Gunter of my decision, giving a week’s notice and thanking him for the great opportunity he had given me. He quite understood and wished me well. I would miss my co-workers, but not the smelly diesel exhaust fumes of the trucks and taxis we serviced.

From my apartment, the walk to the von Steuben was not much further than the gas station had been. The hotel was only about a city block from the Wiesbaden Hauptbahnhof, and though I could take a city bus, I usually walked with my umbrella in hand and made it home in about 30 minutes.

I would eventually keep my kitchen dishwashing job through the first week of March and enjoyed the exercise of walking back and forth from my apartment. But in the cold air of January I often worked late, cleaning up after hotel parties, so that I gave up building a fire in my room and chose the warmth of my bed where I was soon awakened by my wind-up alarm clock bell. Jumping into my clothes and jacket, I would jog or

briskly walk through the cool damp morning to a hot breakfast of oatmeal, toast and coffee before diving into the pile of dirty dishes and glasses waiting for me. During the month of January, taking only a couple of days off, I clocked in 345 hours of work; a record I would long remember with pride, as I never would exceed it in my life.



General von Steuben Hotel, Wiesbaden 1961

Chapter 9

Christmas with Rich

Shortly after I started washing dishes, in early December, I got a postcard from Rich. He was in Berlin and out of money. It turned out that after his initial sale of a set of encyclopedias a month earlier, he had been unable to make another sale and with his boss reluctant to advance him more money, he was planning to skip out on his hotel bill and find a ride back to Wiesbaden. Now, with Christmas approaching, I received a phone message at the hotel kitchen that I should contact Rich at the Officer's Club on the air base. I decided to wait a few days before boarding the shuttle bus on the afternoon of Christmas Eve. Rich was there alright, but I didn't recognize him.

"What happened to you?" was my greeting as I shook my head in amazement.

"They put the boots to me." He mumbled out the side of his bruised and swollen mouth. Half his face looked like an over ripe melon, all puffed out with scrapes and scabs. The guys from Oregon who worked at the club had sleeping quarters upstairs and had taken Rich in about a week earlier. One of the guys, Tim, explained how he had gone with Rich, last Saturday over to Frankfurt and they proceeded to consume several liters of beer. Stumbling out of the beer hall, Rich was looking like a local German with his beard and trench coat when he remarked loudly about "stupid Americans". That's when a couple of GIs unloaded with bare knuckles and once he lay on the sidewalk, proceeded to kick him in the gut and head. With Tim hollering at them, they backed off with a few F--- you remarks. Rich and Tim make it back to the officer's club and since the cuts weren't deep enough to require stitches, he never did see a doctor.

I was invited to stay over for Christmas Day and we had a low key relaxing holiday. I brought a bottle of Rhine wine and our records to play familiar tunes. It was the first Christmas away from home for all of us, and we each had stories to share about Christmas past. I was surprised at myself not feeling homesick and rather enjoyed my feeling of independence. We all shared a pride in making our own way, surviving overseas, not afraid of doing menial kitchen work in order to achieve a higher goal. For most of us, it was to travel to many countries as cheaply as possible. None of us had phoned home or intended to. Occasional letters care of American Express were sufficient contact with family or friends back home. My mother wrote every month or so with concerns for my well being including wanting me to find a church to attend on Sundays. I reassured her that there were many protestant churches throughout Europe, but I never did attend a service, preferring to marvel at the architecture, artistic statues, paintings and stained glass windows of the Catholic churches instead.

Chapter 10

Kitchen Work

I worked steady, almost every day through January and February, washing dishes, glasses, and when I absolutely had to, pots and pans. The latter I avoided because of the very hot water and nasty scrubbing to get burned food and grease off the pans. Now my summer clean up times back home would pay off as I felt quite comfortable with my hands in sudsy water washing glasses.

The hotel kitchen was fairly large with a number of interesting characters working along side me. Mostly men, they all came from other countries; Italy, Lebanon, Greece and Iran. The most intriguing guy, Malek Abraham, was from Iran. The American GIs who came in during evenings and weekends made fun of him, but I liked his simple, sincere ways. Once he cut his hand on a broken glass and a GI told him to hold it over his head to reduce the bleeding. He ran to the head chef shouting "I go hospital" and later returned to show his bandages. During the weeks we worked together I got to know him well. He was fluent in English and not only enjoyed telling me about Iran, but invited me to visit him there. The son of a middle class business man, he was proud to show off his brightly colored clothes and would have given me his multi colored leather shoes except that my feet were too large. A couple of times we got together on days off to put on neckties, sport coats and trench coats to take the train to Frankfurt for shopping and a German style lunch at a restaurant. I thoroughly enjoyed being with Malek as he reinforced my feeling that there are kind, generous people in every culture.

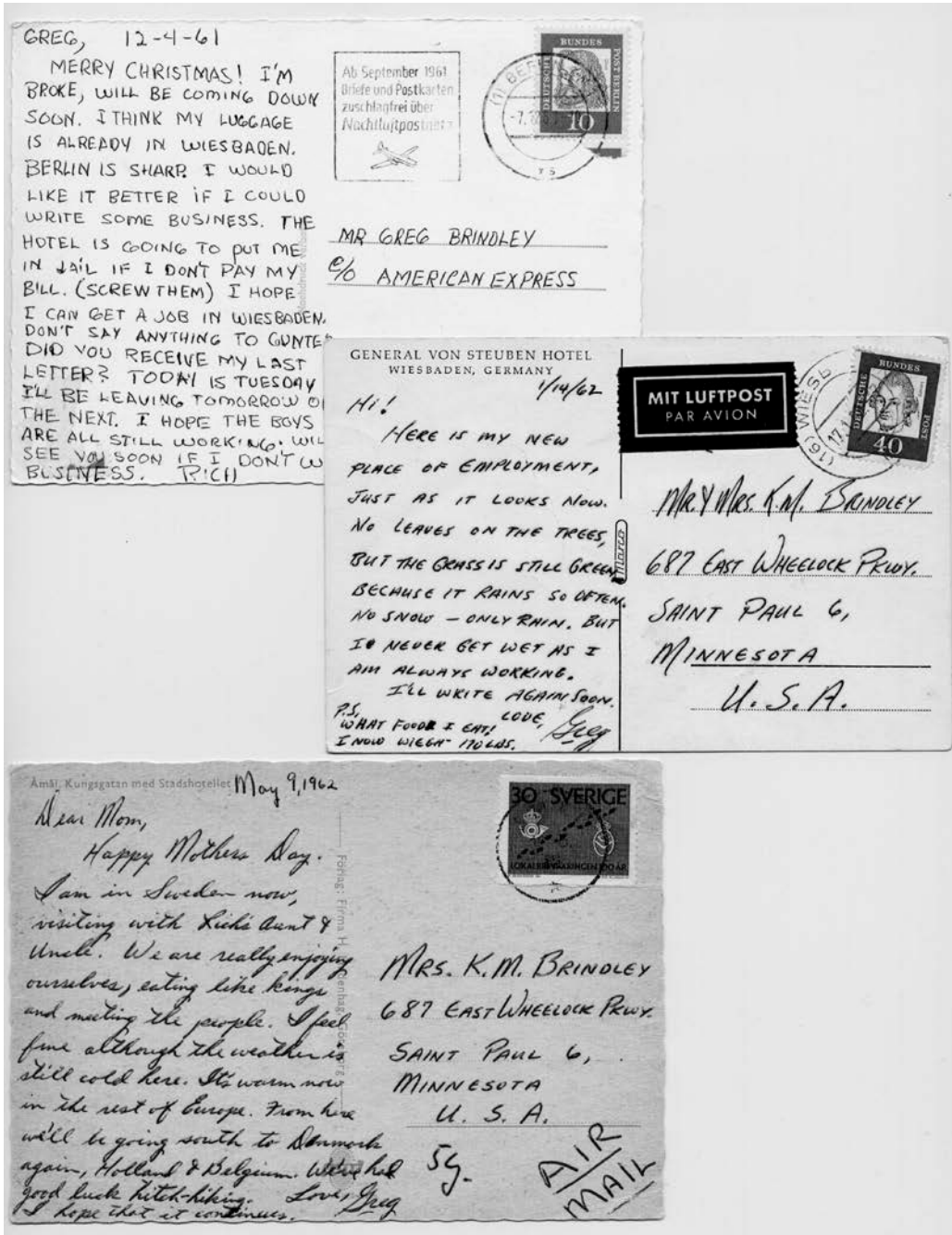
Another guy I got to know was Ken Brosk, an American in the Air Force who lived off base with his wife, Renatta, a German woman from Wiesbaden. Ken was fluent in German, which helped me a lot as he was able to communicate concerns any of us had to Herr Munsch about problems in the kitchen. I enjoyed several visits with Ken and Renatta at their apartment and with his sporty Volkswagen Karmen Gia; they offered to take me touring in the countryside. But most often I declined, as I was too busy accumulating as many working hours as possible, especially on weekends when others wanted time off.

During meal times the kitchen was always a flurry of waiters coming and going to the dining room, cooks dressed all in white with puffy hats and aprons hanging from chains around their waists. All men, they seemed to take pride in doing their job well and I think their pay was very good compared to other Wiesbaden restaurants.

The dirty dish area where I worked was at the far end of the kitchen and at the other end, by the dining room, was old Hans, the dessert maker who often bellowed out "ice cups!" as he was running out of the large, heavy stemmed glasses which he used for ice cream sundaes. I usually was at the sink washing and rinsing glassware and put off doing his ice cups because they mucked up my clear sudsy water with sticky ice cream and toppings. Hans always glared at me as I delivered a tray of clean cups to him, but he never complained about me to Herr Munsch.

Weekends I usually had the opportunity to stay late, as two of us were always needed to wash dishes and glasses after evening parties. There was an upstairs party

room for special events which often continued until 1am. As the waiters brought us the last of the drinks glasses to wash, they would leave the unfinished wine bottles for us to enjoy. That gave me a nice warm glow to carry me home through the damp night air. One Sunday morning I arrived and did a final check of our banquet clean up only to find my Italian co-worker asleep on the floor. It was too much wine for this guy!



Top: Postcard to Greg in Wiesbaden from Rich in Berlin

Middle: Postcard to parents from Greg in Wiesbaden

Bottom: Mothers Day postcard from Greg in Sweden

Chapter 11

Surprise Visit

As the days past in February, the little snow that fell had melted and more hours of sunlight gave me the itch to hit the road. Rich had been working with the Oregon guys at the air base club and together we figured that we had enough money to get through the next few months of hitch-hiking. Not wanting to ask my parents for money, instead I wrote to my grandmother, asking if she would loan me two hundred dollars to purchase a return boat ticket. Of course Grandma Vi wanted to see me again and within a few weeks, a check from her had arrived at the American Express. I did repay her by working at Dad's gas station the following summer, but never did tell my parents about it. And Grandma again showed her love for me by keeping this loan "just between us".

With the return ticket secured, I set my sights on hitting the road to a warmer climate. Rich and I had already packed the foot locker to send to the Holland-America Lines warehouse in Rotterdam. All our dress-up clothes, records and souvenirs were in it. Among my keepsakes, which I still have, were a U-Tank ashtray and a set of von Steuben stainless knives, forks and spoons. During my stay in Germany, I purchased only a few things; umbrella, silk scarf, 35mm camera and a special glass vase as a gift for my mother. The vase I carefully wrapped with clothing and packed in the foot locker. The camera I used to take photos around Wiesbaden before taking it on the road. It would soon provide some memorable snapshots of our journey.

The excitement of our anticipated travel was multiplied one day as I was called out of the kitchen to meet a visitor who was asking for me. There stood Ron Blegan in his business suit and briefcase with a wide grin on his face.

"Good to see you, buddy!" he shouted as I stammered, "What the hell?"

I got off work early and we took the blue shuttle bus to see Rich at the club. Rich too was completely surprised to see him. It seems that Ron had learned about my working at the hotel by calling Doc Bailey before leaving New York. He had a long story to tell about an unhappy marriage to an airline stewardess from New York whose father had hired him to do work he couldn't tolerate. One day as he rode the train to work in Manhattan, he decided to leave it all, went to the airport and bought a plane ticket to Frankfurt. With no suitcase or change of clothing, he carried only his briefcase. He decided to stay with Rich at the club and we invited him to join us in our travels. Within a week we had all purchased canvas back packs and light weight sleeping bags. I would start hitch-hiking alone, and Ron with Rich, meet up at a youth hostel in Nice, France, on the sunny Riviera.

Chapter 12

Drab Trab

Ken Brosk dropped me off at the autobahn entrance headed for the Black Forest. In a short time I was riding with a German salesman who was happy to practice his English on an American who spoke with a Midwestern accent. He remarked how most American GIs had a distinct Southern accent, no matter what state they came from. Another piece of my education; somebody always has a different observation to relate, and I always have something more to learn. Soon we were passing through the Black Forest area with pine trees remarkably like those in Northern Minnesota.

My next ride was with a Frenchman who took me over the border crossing at Saarbrücken. Entering France, the driver turned on the radio to enjoy some music. The melancholy voice of Edith Piaf singing “La Vie en Rose” stayed with me for days as I would hear it again coming from radios in small village cafes. By late afternoon, I suddenly realized that I would need to find lodging and asked the driver how to say “youth hostel” in French. I have never forgotten “l’Auberge de la Jeunesse” and enjoyed an overnight stay in Nancy. Here I was introduced to “café au lait”; espresso coffee in a large cup of milk.

It took me a few days to get through France as the major highways were mostly wide two way traffic roads. Drivers would drift over to the side of the blacktop roadway to allow the fast ones to pass by going down the middle. I was constantly gawking as we passed rural farms with cattle or sheep grazing, farmers doing spring plowing on tractors and rolling countryside with hills, valleys and occasional canopies of huge tree branches extending over the roadway. It occurred to me that American road builders would have removed those trees long ago, but the French preserved them, widening the blacktop road and let drivers fend for themselves to avoid sideswiping the guard rails.

My progress was slowed as most drivers were ending their travel at a town and would drop me off near the village center. As I walked through to get to the far side and resume hitch-hiking, I would stop to shop for fresh bread and sample local wine. “Vin ordinaire” was fine by me; always the cheapest, but quite satisfying, sitting at a sidewalk table where I could observe the locals, as they wondered and often stared at this stranger in their town.

At the outskirts of Dejon a ’59 Chevy pulled up along side me. It was a sleek gull winged model, much like the one that carried us into New York City. But it looked like a monstrous thing compared to the small fuel efficient vehicles of Europe. Two young GIs asked me to get in as they were headed back to their post, which they called “Drab Trab”. It stood for something like Travis Air Base with the ‘drab’ referring to their opinion of the living conditions. When I told them I was headed for the Riviera, their eyes lit up and they began plotting how they could drive straight through and be there in time to see the sun rise over the Mediterranean Sea. We whizzed past the entrance to Drab Trab and were fifty miles farther down the road when they had second thoughts.

“It was such a great idea!” one of them remarked as they let me out in Lyon, the second largest city in France. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience of walking through

many villages and cities on my way south. I had made great progress since I had entered France March 8, and by March 13 had checked into the Nice Youth Hostel. That time included the 24 hours when I was stuck in the rain, under my umbrella, trying to get a ride out of Marseilles on the only highway along the seacoast to Nice. I gave up after dark and spent a few francs for a tiny, but dry hotel room long the road. Next day, with a continental breakfast and sunshine at my back, I found a ride to Cannes, home of the famous film festival, and then all the way to Nice. Sure enough, Rich and Ron were already at l'Auberg de la Jeunesse waiting for me.

We spent a few days there in this beautiful villa on a hill overlooking the sea. It had been given by a family for use as a youth hostel and was very clean. It was a relaxing place to hang out together with young people from many countries. Ron was now wearing a blue navy coat and French beret. He had gotten a guitar somewhere and was quite intent on learning to play it. We did our own cooking, usually veggie soup with long loaves of crusty bread for lunch, and coffee, buttery croissants and omelets for breakfast.

In the afternoon we kicked back with a bottle of red wine, a loaf of bread and cheese. Rich pulled out a blue pack of French cigarettes called something like Gallwaz and tossed me one. It was the strongest, blackest tobacco I had ever smoked. When I stopped coughing, he suggested I go back to rolling my own; which I did with the little roller gizmo I had bought in a Wiesbaden shop, along with a nifty lighter that didn't need fluid like my Zippo. It had a battery to heat a wire that would ignite the tobacco, and a little flashlight bulb too.

As we packed our backpacks to head for Italy, the three of us agreed to travel together, but buy bus or train tickets if hitch-hiking wasn't working.

Chapter 13

Italia

Leaving Nice on the main highway along the rocky coast of the Mediterranean, we lucked out as a truck driver had room for all of us. It was a slow go, but a thrilling sight as we passed through old fishing villages and Monaco, with its famous Monte Carlo gambling casino and home of Princess Grace Kelly. We soon arrived at the border crossing and got out to walk through customs. I gave Ron my camera and asked him to get a photo of Rich and me walking into Italy. I still have the photo with us dressed in blue jeans, high school jackets with leather sleeves, a brimmed hat to keep out the rain, a sleeping bag and loaf of French bread sticking out of my backpack. It was a picturesque crossing with the road cut deep into gray rock overlooking the sparkling blue sea. It was March 15, only a week after leaving the cloudy skies of Germany as the three of us relished the sunshine.

As we got more rides on our journey to Genoa, with its statue of Christopher Columbus, we stopped one afternoon to don our swim shorts and get our feet wet in the cool sea water. After a one night stay at the ostello (youth hostel) in Genoa, we pushed on to Pizza with the amazing 800 year old leaning tower. We were not allowed to enter it as a sign in English indicated it was unsafe to walk the stairs. Waking up in the Pizza Ostello, we surveyed the rainy overcast skies and soon boarded a bus for Rome, bypassing the art treasures of Florence since we intended to turn back at Rome and would visit them on our way to Paris. I couldn't imagine then how much our plans would change.

The bus delivered us to the main railway station in Rome, and as we had learned in Germany, the best way to learn about available lodging is to find the information desk inside the train station. The English speaking clerk provided us with a map of Rome and number of the green city bus leading to an ostello in a very old building. We spent a few days there, mainly sightseeing, walking or taking city buses, which all had "Roma" stamped on the front. Rich was a real history nut and knew more than I about significant ruins; the Forum, Coliseum, Trevi Fountain and Spanish Stairs were fascinating to see as the three of us walked along, following our map while eyeing the shapely legs of numerous young ladies in skirts and spring dresses.

On Sunday morning we were in the midst of a large crowd inside St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. None of us were Catholic, so it was merely a coincidence that the Pope appeared at a second story window. With a red banner hanging down from the sill, he used a microphone to convey blessings on everyone in several languages. The blessing I felt was less a spiritual one than feeling fortunate to be in this historical place among Italians and foreigners from all over the world. After the Pope retired, we proceeded to walk through the massive church of St. Peter with its huge statues, gigantic dome and stained glass windows. Rich really wanted to see the paintings of Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel nearby, but it was closed for renovation.

By now we were all suffering with head colds and sleeping together in a large room, I awoke to find shoes on my blanket. I looked over at Rich as he picked up another one and tossed it at me; “You snore a lot!”

We all wanted to move on, but as Rich convinced me to keep going east to Greece, Ron declared his regret about leaving his wife and decided to return home and face the music. Backpack and guitar in hand, he hopped a city bus headed for the airport. Goodbye Ron. Not feeling very healthy, Rich and I opted for a train to Brindisi, where a boat connection would take us to Athens, Greece. It felt strange to me to discover a city in Italy with a name nearly the same as my family name, which traced back to England. I wondered if maybe we are all connected by the past, as Rich reminded me that at one time the Romans had conquered part of England.

We arrived after a long day on the train to find that a boat was leaving in a few hours and it offered cheap tickets for people willing to ride “Deck Class”. That, we soon learned, meant not on the main deck, but well below deck. With only a short time to shop, we found some bread, cheese, salami and a large, but cheap two liter bottle of vermouth to snack on during the journey. Our below deck quarters were Spartan. Wooden racks, recently constructed inside this old ship, seemed designed to hold luggage for the first and second class passengers above, but with plenty of empty space for backpackers or frugal travelers like us to roll out our sleeping bags and rest soundly as the ship gently rolled across the Adriatic Sea.

The opposite shore at this point was the country of Albania, one of the few communist government countries stamped into my passport as “Forbidden” by the US State Department. We awoke to a clanging of the steel door opening to a dock somewhere in Greece. I had no idea how many stops we would make over our two day journey to Piraeus, the port city serving Athens. At each of the several stops, few passengers got off, but many got on; people of all ages, some bringing live animals with them. Not pets, but sheep, goats and chickens that would probably be sold at the end of the journey. Thankfully we shared the space for hours, not days, as there was little movement of air and no port holes to open for fresh air. How beautiful the scenery was, we’ll never know as our only view out the open cargo door was at each docking.

Our fellow travelers included many backpackers, about our age, from Australia, France and Germany. A couple had guitars and provided pleasant melodies as we shared food and drink. Passing around bread, cheese and wine, we were glad to put in our food and the huge bottle of vermouth, as we couldn’t possibly drink it all and didn’t want to carry it off the ship. Upon arrival, we found an old, inexpensive bus and headed for Athens.

Chapter 14

City of Dusty Feet

Rich was so excited to see the ancient ruins in and around Athens that he was up early at the youth hostel. I thought we should wash clothes first, since this place had clothes lines for drying outside in the sun after washing by hand. But he protested that we were just going to get our clothes dusty all day. Turned out he was right. I soon thought of Athens as the city of dusty feet, with the shoe shine business active on every street corner. We took a bus to the nearby Acropolis hill and spent the day prowling the dusty ruins of the Parthenon temple with its beautiful, massive columns of solid stone.

Walking back through the city center, we had our first encounter with bar girls. A hustler guy on the sidewalk asked us to come inside the bar for a drink. Out of curiosity we sat down on bar stools to consider what to order. Immediately two young girls appeared next to us and I saw dollar signs flashing in my head. My gut feeling was that we would be charged big bucks for the girls to drink something along side us. We both said "Let's go!" at the same time and were out on the sidewalk in a flash.

We were in Athens about five days and one afternoon enjoyed viewing a national day parade including soldiers, military weapons and marching bands. Sidewalk vendors sold balloons and ice cream to kids sitting on their parents' shoulders. It reminded me of the annual Payne Avenue Harvest Festival parade back home in St. Paul.

But here in Athens, Rich threw another wild idea at me - Istanbul. I really wanted to return to Italy and then head for Paris. But Rich, with his passion for history, was itching to see Istanbul, the former eastern capital of the Roman Empire; the place where cultures of the east meet west.

All I could say was "What the hell. Let's go."

The next day, after buying our boat tickets, we heard from fellow backpackers at the youth hostel that we could get a visa to Turkey at the border and that buying Turkish lira in Athens would be a better exchange rate than inside Turkey. We found a bank with international currencies, but as we approached the cashier, a young guy ahead of us just got the last of the bank's supply of lira.

"Hey, buddy," Rich called out to this tall, blond haired guy, "can we buy some of your lira?"

His name was Ken, from Chicago. He was traveling alone, driving a Volkswagen and invited us to join him and share gas expenses. We shook on it, cashed in our boat tickets and went out together for dinner to a small café where I tasted octopus for the first time. It had a chewy, rubbery texture, but was served cut up in a tasty sauce. We hit the road early the next day.

Chapter 15

Spots on the Wall

What a relief, cruising down the road in Ken's Volkswagen, to realize that we wouldn't need to look for another ride, all the way to Istanbul and then to Austria, which was Ken's destination.

Our first stop was in Delphi, ancient site of the famous oracles, where virgins were said to be sacrificed to the gods. I arranged for Rich to snap a photo of me lying on a large stone slab, while Ken posed with a knife, ready to sacrifice me. He may have used my switch blade, which I bought in Germany and found ideal for slicing cheese and sausage while on the road.

The following afternoon we arrived in Larisa, a small city with buildings familiar to Greece; brick or clay earthen structures, all painted white to repel the heat of the sun. We located a small hotel and rang the bell at the sidewalk gate. The clerk welcomed us on the intercom and with a buzz to unlock the gate; we walked through a dusty courtyard with a few small trees and bushes growing along the inner walls. Climbing up the courtyard stairs to the hotel lobby, we found the young clerk who spoke English quite well. All of his rooms were on the second floor, above the shops lining the outer sidewalk.

Learning that Larisa had a number of restaurants and inexpensive night clubs within walking distance, we decided to enjoy some good food and musical entertainment. Along the way, Ken told us about a Greek liquor called Uzzo and said we have to try it. There were few cars and trucks on the streets in the early evening, but in the middle of one intersection we found a policeman standing on a pedestal directing traffic with outstretched white gloves. On a lark, Ken ran over to him and asked where we could get some Uzzo. I saw the cop laugh, point to his watch and hold up three fingers. Ken returned laughing about how in a few minutes the cop would take us to find it. Sure enough, the cop walked over to us, in his light blue uniform, taking off his blue and white striped arm band that must have indicated being off duty. He spoke enough English to get us to follow him and soon entered a small café where he ordered a round of Uzzo. It was served in small glasses and we all followed his lead as he proceeded to swallow it all in one gulp. Oh, it was warm, licorice tasting and I felt the glow all the way down to my stomach. Ken got the next round and the cop arranged for a small pitcher of water, showing us how it turns milky white when diluted with water. We all tried it that way, giving a toast to the cop. With that, he explained that he needed to get home to his family and was out the door. But we were just getting started!

Bar hopping around the area, stopping long enough for a little food, we ended up on a dance floor with some local girls. As we stumbled back to our table, I asked Rich how we would find our hotel. He and Ken were laughing it up, saying they didn't give a shit. Somehow we did manage to locate the hotel gate, got buzzed in and staggered up to our room. I turned the key to lock the door, then once more to double-lock it. We all passed out in our clothes.

With only one eye open, I knew it was morning as the sun, beaming off the white courtyard walls in through our window, lit up the room. I got up to wash the sleep out of my eyes in the tiny sink beside the window, and noticed some mouse droppings in the basin.

“Dam, we’ve got mice in here!” I was looking for something to use to clean it out when I heard a hoarse sounding “It was me,” coming from Rich’s mouth.

“What?” I barked. This woke Ken up.

Rich went on to tell how in the middle of the night he had to “take a shit” and couldn’t unlock the door to get to the toilet down the hall.

“So?”

“So I took a dump in the white thing over there. Then it smelled so bad I got out my hanky, picked it up and threw it out the window.” By now Ken was laughing so hard he rolled onto the floor.

“Oh God!” I looked across the courtyard to see brown spots on the white wall, and a stained hanky fluttering from a tree branch, like a flag of desperation.

Nursing huge hangovers, we soon showered and piled into the Volkswagen. We said little to each other, feeling like real “Ugly Americans,” but I told them how I gave the desk clerk a big tip without saying why.

“You dumb shit!” Ken laughed, and told us how he also had left a big tip when he paid for the room on our way out. I hope it went to the person who had to clean the wall.

Chapter 16

Goat's milk

Rich curled up in the back seat of the Volkswagen, letting the hum of the rear engine lull him to sleep as he nursed his hangover. Up front Ken tried to avoid bumps and potholes as we felt only slightly better than Rich.

Staying overnight in the city of Thessalonica, we found a hotel room to get an early rest. I took a short walk outside and noticed a shop selling Uzzo. Rich was asleep when I returned and Ken was chuckling to himself as I placed the bottle on the night stand next to Rich.

“It’ll be the first thing he sees when he wakes up in the morning.”

“Assholes!” was followed by “Let’s go!” I knew Rich was anxious to be on the road again.

We made pretty good time through northern Greece considering the main road wasn’t paved and loaded with pot holes. At one point we were brought to a stop by a sheppard, moving a flock of sheep down the road. I jumped out to get a photo of the VW along side of the flock. At least there were few cars or trucks sharing the highway with us.

There was another sign that we were far from any populated modern city. Toilets in this part of the world consisted of two outlines of footprints on the floor, and between them, a hole. Scraps of paper hung on a nail and a bucket of water for flushing completed these “do it yourself” biffys. After stopping to eat at a little café, we used the toilet. Returning to the car, I gave Rich a “wow” look.

He threw me a grin. “If you don’t like it, get yourself a first class ticket.”

Passing through one small town on a Sunday morning, I noticed groups of people dressed in fine white suits and dresses walking along the dusty road. Ken guessed they were coming home from church. We decided to stop for lunch. Our car was the only vehicle parked along side this small but cozy café. It looked like a “Mom and Pop” operation, standing by itself with living quarters out back, surrounded by some trees, bushes and little tufts of grass here and there on the brown, dusty soil. As we entered, I noticed only one table occupied by a young couple. Seating ourselves, we were approached by a young man who passed each of us a menu, handwritten in Greek. O.K., that didn’t work. Ken tried communicating in English, German and French by naming various foods. The young man’s eyes lit up over “omelet”, so we all agree to have eggs for lunch. Rich had a craving for milk and somehow got that across to our host, who then called out to a boy in the kitchen who raced out the back door. The milk arrived after we finished our omelets, served warm in a cup. Rich offered us a taste before he drank it all. Throughout the time we were eating, more people kept arriving to fill all the tables. Ken, Rich and I all looked at each other. Wow! All these people, dressed in their Sunday best, are staring at us. We felt like celebrities, and I suppose as genuine foreigners, we were the talk of the town that day: dressed in jeans and sweatshirts, tall, blond haired guys in a sea of black haired locals.

As we got in the VW, I noticed out back of the café, two white goats--fresh goat’s milk!

Chapter 17

Bread Napkins

Our stop at the Turkish border lasted a few hours as we had to be approved for visas. It was then a short distance to the amazing city of Istanbul. The recommendation of many backpackers for an inexpensive stay was a small hotel run by the YMCA. Not since New York had we encountered the Y, but it turned out fine; cheap, clean and comfortable.

Rich was in heaven, dragging Ken and I to famous historical places including Haga St. Sophia, the colossal, domed mosque, originally a Christian church before being transformed to a Moslem mosque, and now a museum. We also visited the magnificent Blue mosque, an active place of worship with tall minarets, a blue tinted dome and floor completely covered with hundreds of finely woven carpets, which we walked on, bare footed, with our shoes left at the entrance. Colorful symbols, written in Arabic, were hanging throughout the huge structure, which struck me as being similar to enormous Christian places of worship. We spent an entire afternoon walking through a mammoth covered bazaar, with a ceiling two or three stories high in place over the streets filled with stalls and vendors of everything imaginable; clothing, food, jewelry, and tons of hand crafted stuff.

We found small cafes near the Y with delicious food and jovial waiters. Finding no common language to order our meals, we resorted to what I call international sign language, using hand and facial gestures. The waiters often invited us back to the kitchen where we could point to the hot entrées and soups simmering in round shallow pans over a huge stove. We then would be seated and wait to be served our selections. Noodles with bits of meat and lots of vegetables smothered in a delicious sauce were my favorites. The waiter served this with a large pie shaped wedge of fresh bread cut from a round loaf about four inches high. As I held this warm moist wedge to my face and inhaled the aroma, I noticed others in the café doing the same. But not only that, they were using the bread to wipe their mouths – bread napkins!

Chapter 18

Dinner with the Marines

Before leaving Istanbul, we stopped for a view of the busy bridge over the Bosphorus, that narrow waterway separating Europe from Asia. Without crossing it, we made quickly for the highway we had traveled just days before and soon arrived back in Greece. But this time we turned north into Yugoslavia, on our way to Austria. This was known as the communist land of Marshal Tito, the general who fought against the Germans during World War II, but allied his country with Russia afterward. Part of the main highway was newly constructed as a freeway they called the Autoput, but parts of it were closed due to springtime mud slides from the hills.

Arriving in the capital of Belgrade, with its old but drab buildings and churches, we settled into a hotel with a ballroom and décor reminiscent of the 1940's. Before setting out to find a restaurant, Ken came up with the idea to check out the U.S. Embassy.

Why not? I thought as I had never seen one of our foreign embassies. Sure enough, the security guards were genuine U.S. Marines and we asked for their advice on finding dinner. Checking out our passports for I.D., they surprised us by inviting us to join them for dinner at the embassy restaurant inside the compound. It felt weird to be eating a good ole American style meal so far from home and having a conversation with the Marines about living in a communist country. Yugoslavia struck me as less advanced economically as I saw few autos and little building construction going on. One stark difference was the complete lack of advertising signs for businesses or products to sell. The next day we were back on the road, taking turns at the wheel as we continued north.

Chapter 19

Sound of Music

Crossing into Austria, we headed straight to Vienna where Ken planned to stay with friends. Like so many chance encounters throughout our journeys, we would soon be going our own ways, never to see each other again. By now I was used to these farewells and accepted the idea that I needed to let go of people who are traveling on a different path than I.

Vienna survived the war without heavy bombing and we found many beautiful, old, ornate stone buildings adorned with carved lace and tiny statues. The people spoke a familiar German language, but with a strange accent that I rather enjoyed hearing. Ken thought they sounded like someone talking with a mouthful of mashed potatoes. Now we could easily understand the menus posted outside each restaurant and with prices as our guide, chose some delicious, inexpensive meals.

The next day we bid farewell to Ken as he dropped us off at the autobahn entrance ramp. Waiting to catch another ride, we agreed that the past few weeks were great fun, and though we would miss his companionship, teaming up with Ken was a wise choice.

It didn't take long to catch a ride and my views of the long green valley surrounded by snow capped peaks of the Alps gave me a feeling that spring had arrived. Approaching the city of Salzburg, it felt like we were in the land of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Sound of Music".

That night in our youth hostel, we laid out our plans to head for Sweden to see Rich's aunt and uncle before catching the boat in Rotterdam. Along the way we could stop in Germany for a visit with the Derikartz family who Doc Bailey had been pestering us to visit. Doc had stayed with this family the previous summer when he led a group of Americans to Germany as part of the Experiment in International Living. Their son Rolf might soon be attending college at River Falls and Doc was anxious for us to meet him and give his parents a student perspective of the school. Neither Rich nor I were excited about a family visit as we had grown accustomed to the youth hostel crowd of characters from all over the world.

None the less, we decided to push on into Germany, leaving behind the stunning beauty of the mountain peaks and found a ride across the border to Munich. We spent a day there visiting some old Catholic churches including one in a small, very fancy, rococo style, with tall stained glass windows and lots of detailed statues and lace carved in stone, which struck me as gaudy. We passed up a visit to Hitler's famous retreat in the nearby mountains and opted for an evening in a large Munich beer hall, complete with a traditional band of musicians clad in "leder hosen", suspenders and green hats with a feather. I told Rich I really liked the huge one liter glass beer mugs which were delivered to the tables by barmaids carrying eight at a time by their handles.

"Go ahead, take it," he dared me.

Out on the street, I opened my jacket to reveal one beer stained mug with a Lowenbrau logo on the side. This one made it all the way home with me, unbroken.

Chapter 20

Lengerich Home Stay

We had good luck hitchhiking on the autobahn using a cardboard sign I had just made with large letters: USA STUDENT. Being back in Germany I figured we'd have better luck getting rides if drivers knew we were students, as opposed to US military; me at least. Rich definitely didn't look the part as his beard was now fuller and longer, hanging out over his scarf, and with his blond hair, many people guessed he was German or Scandinavian.

It was definitely spring now with trees and grass greening and flowers blooming on the bushes along the roads. We did a little site seeing through Germany, when at times we were taken off the autobahn onto roadways along the Rhine River with its steep banks filled with vineyards.

Arriving in Lengerich, near the Netherlands border, we phoned the Derikartz family. Rolf's father, Ulrich, soon came by car to take us to their home, a modern house with extra guest rooms and a sunny patio out back. We were given a warm welcome and immediately sat down to a lunch of dark bread, loaded with butter, cheese, slices of wurst, fruit and, the biggest treat for Rich, fresh milk. During meals we shared with them, an interesting conversation was ever present. Rolf's parents spoke limited English as Rich and I used our limited German, with translations offered by Rolf, his sister Konstanza and his brother Franko. Ulrich spoke at length about his strong feelings of working toward peace in the world, by creating a better understanding among people from other cultures, using face to face encounters. In cooperation with the Experiment in International Living organization, he opened his home and eventually hosted hundreds of foreigners over many years.

After a few days of family living, Rich and I were both restless for the open road and accepted a ride to a main highway with Ulrich and Rolf. We would see Rolf again in about a year when he arrived at the River Falls campus.



Mrs. Derikartz, Greg, Rich, Rolf Derikartz at their home in Lengerich, Germany

Chapter 21

Swedish Relatives

Hitching rides through northern Germany and Denmark went well with sunny weather and friendly drivers. It was also more interesting as the autobahn did not extend much beyond Hamburg. This allowed us a more scenic route at a slower pace with numerous towns and villages to pass through.

In northern Denmark we stayed at the Arhus Youth Hostel before hitching to Frederikshaven where we boarded a ferry boat for a few hours ride to Goteborg, Sweden. The sea was rough and in the small craft I felt the dreaded up-chucking of sea sickness coming over me for the first time. It was over as soon as we landed and there we discovered that Swedes drove on the left side of the road. Beyond the modern city of Goteborg, we were traveling over rocky ground with tall pine trees similar to what Minnesotans call Norway pine and the sight was all so comfortable and familiar to us. Enjoying the sunny but cool springtime, we easily found rides north about a hundred miles to Amal, the small town of Rich's aunt and uncle.

We stopped only for Rich to buy some flowers before arriving at their clean, white painted, wood frame house. The sister of Rich's father and her husband were both retired, but their hospitality was over whelming. They welcomed us to their modest home with a meal of fish and potatoes, baked in a wood burning kitchen stove. We slept soundly in soft beds with clean, fresh smelling, sun dried sheets encased in down filled comforters.

Neither Rich nor I spoke Swedish, despite both of us having common ancestry from this country. Three of my grandparents were entirely of Swedish descent, along with both of Rich's parents. Carl Engstrom, my Grandma Vi's husband, was born I found out later, in Arvika, a town only fifty miles farther north of Amal. He had died in 1959 and as a boy, I never heard him speak of his youth in Arvika, or use his native language. While his English always had a Swedish accent, he considered himself all American.

Rich did his best to communicate with his relatives, and as they had no children, enlisted an English speaking neighbor to help translate. They wanted us to stay for at least a week, but after a few days, we were giving hugs of farewell, leaving behind a teary eyed auntie.

Chapter 22

Return Voyage

Retracing our route back to Denmark, we spent a few days visiting Snead in Esbjerg, snapping a few photos, and then south through Germany where we stayed a night at the Hamburg Youth Hostel. Years later I learned that at this same time, a group of four guys about our age from England had just started a band, and were playing their rock and roll stuff at a place called the Star night club. At that time we had no interest in spending the last of our money for live entertainment by the Beatles.

We were soon back in Holland and had a few days at the Rotterdam Youth Hostel before boarding the very same SS Grotte Beer, sailing for New York. On board we found three of the guys from Oregon who had sailed with us nine months earlier and had worked with Rich at the Wiesbaden Officer's Club. This time we had our own money to spend, though we reserved some for the final stretch to St. Paul.

It was a relaxing Atlantic crossing in June; no icebergs like the Titanic encountered, but my thoughts wandered back to imagine my Grandpa Carl, some fifty years earlier in 1909, making this voyage and even farther back, other relatives sailing from the old country to the new land. Now I was headed there, to the land of door knobs, ice cubes, big cars and rock 'n roll music.

I also had time to figure out the cost of my nine months abroad. Based on what I started with, what I had earned in Germany, borrowed from Grandma Vi and had left in my pocket, it had totaled \$1,200.

The thought of returning to America held a feeling of excitement for me, unlike the anxiety of striking out for Europe, I had confidence in myself to return to school at River Falls and be serious about my studies. Although I remained unsure of a future career, I had a strong feeling in my gut that I should be working with people in a helping profession.

After nine days, we glided smoothly into New York harbor and there through the haze stood the green lady, otherwise known as the Statue of Liberty, tall and proud looking; at least that's how I felt viewing her from the open deck of an arriving ship.

We eased into the dock on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River, walked down the gangplank to find our footlocker and lined up for US Immigration and Customs inspection. We were greeted by a smiling face and "Welcome home!" with an "Admitted June 1, 1962" stamped into our passports by an Immigration official.

Next it was "Open the bags!" It took me by surprise since this was the first time we had to lay bare our stuff for a customs agent. Five minutes of probing through our bags and foot locker was followed by "Close it up." Without comment, we moved on to arrange to send the footlocker home by Railway Express Co. and walked out into the afternoon sun.

By sundown we were on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, headed west, searching for another ride. At a Howard Johnson rest stop Rich was hanging back with his scruffy jeans, sandals and full grown beard, while I put on my clean shaven Midwestern smile. It didn't take long before... "Hey Rich! We've got a ride!"



Greg, Rich with friends from Oregon, Germany, Italy, Thailand on SS Groote Beer bound for New York



1965 Quarter Abroad group on SS Aurelia with Nick(right of sign), Rolf, Greg(far right)

After Word

Rich never did return to Europe. About a year following our return, he married, worked at several business ventures, spending his final days running a small tavern near River Falls, where he died of a heart attack in 1996.

Robert B. “Doc” Bailey III launched the Quarter Abroad program in September, 1963 and often spoke of the journey of Rich and myself as the “prototype” for Quarter Abroad. The program continues to this day as Semester Abroad on an annual basis from University of Wisconsin – River Falls. Doc was to enjoy sending students out to explore the world until his retirement in 1992, and death in 1993.

Rolf graduated with me, both as sociology majors, from River Falls in 1968. He returned to Germany, married a lady from England and worked for Caterpillar heavy equipment company until his death in 2000.

Ted Skudlark and Jim LaValle from St.Paul, who helped launch me toward Germany, both have since died in Minnesota.

Happily, Ron Blegan was last known to be living in sunny California. I hope he has fond memories of our time together on the Riviera.

I returned to Europe three more times, always in September, by boat, with Doc Bailey and the River Falls groups. In 1963 I had given some traveling tips to the first Quarter Abroad group in the spring orientation sessions arranged by Doc. I was so enthralled with their plans that I joined them for the boat trip, this time on the SS Aurelia, and spent three months traveling on my own to London, Paris (finally, I made it) and the Munich Oktoberfest before working again in Wiesbaden.

By 1965 I had chosen sociology as my major study and participated as a credit earning Quarter Abroad student along with friends Nick Jadinak, Dave Olson, Rolf Derikartz and Pete Falkman. Nick made other journeys to Europe, traveling as far as the Middle East and North Africa. Dave became an English teacher in Japan and later, South Africa. Both graduated and live near River Falls now.

Pete and I had been friends since junior high school days in St. Paul and became roommates at River Falls. In 1965, I convinced him to save money by hitch-hiking to New York City with me where we would meet the group for the boat trip. Doc Bailey dropped us at the I-94 entrance ramp near River Falls and watched as a station wagon pulled up to offer us a ride. The driver was a teacher returning to Rhode Island and agreed to take us all the way to NYC. It was a good omen for a great experience. We had more hitch-hiking times in Europe before doing our independent studies. I had a home stay arranged by Doc, with the Sixma family in The Hague, Netherlands, to study services for elderly people. Pete studied juvenile delinquency in Sweden. He went on to become a full professor of sociology at Hamline University in St.Paul before he died in 1992.

My last journey by boat across the Atlantic was on the SS Aurelia with the 1969 Quarter Abroad group and it was purely for pleasure. It turned out to be the final crossing arranged by the Council on Student Travel. Jet airplanes were now cheaper, but

nothing could replace nine days at sea of comradeship with students from across the U.S. and from many foreign countries.

I have since worked as a social worker, VISTA Volunteer and now am retired after thirty five years as a special education teacher. With my wife, Jin, who is Chinese, I take annual journeys to Asia. Some day I intend to return with her, to discover a different Europe than the one I remember.

Having experienced life in over twenty foreign countries, I can report that all but a few of the thousands of foreigners I have encountered have treated me with dignity and respect. The most charming and warm hearted responses occurred when I attempted to speak their language and sample their food and drink.

Cheers! Prosit! Skol! Ganbei! Salute! Here's to you!



Greg Brindley, Pete Falkman at l'Opera in Paris during Quarter Abroad studies 1965