

## My Love of Travel (And how I got to where I've been)

Not sure from where my need for travel appeared. But some of it may have developed in my teenage years.

When I was 17 years old, my parents, along with my mom's mom and my three siblings, 16, 14, and 11 traveled from our home town of Lydia, Minnesota (population 150 – and we could name every citizen) to Europe. We visited ten countries in 30 days.

Now THAT was an experience. It wasn't something I wanted or thought about. But my parents did.

They realized that within a year I'd be going off to college and the family unit would never be the same cohesive group.

They used the last of my grandfather's legacy to pay for a budget trip to Europe.

I remember we had Alvina, a co-worker of my mom, stay at our house while we were traveling.

We had lived in our house for 14 years by the time we took this trip and by then, we had no keys for the locks on the doors of our house. This concerned Alvina, but nothing could be done.

As I said, it was a budget trip and I remember all the planning, thought and cost it took to get a phone call to Alvina somewhere during the middle of our trip just to check out how things were going at home. Luckily I don't recall any relayed problems.

Sister, Dana, who was 11 at the time, has a different recollection. She remembers Alvina being very concerned about not being able to lock the door since someone entered our house while she was at work and left cake crumbs in the sink.

Dana also remembers Alvina found her pet parakeet dead in his cage. Alvina said it looked like he broke his neck trying to get out. Dana never bought that explanation for a second.

Each kid got to take a little suitcase for ourselves. It was about half the size of the carry-on I currently use for just my airplane comfort equipment.

We were gone the entire month of June. Not knowing anything about latitude and altitude which can affect temperature, I assumed it would be warm, like the June summers of Minnesota.

I packed one pair of jeans, a couple sleeveless tops, a long thin sleeveless tricot-like dress, smocked at the top, sandals, tennis shoes, a sweatshirt, a (very) pink and colorful flowery mini dress that I sewed myself – it was 1971 – think the crazy flowers and colors of Laugh-In.

Needless to say, when I returned at the end of the month I had learned how f...ing long a pair of jeans takes to dry when you wash and wring it out in a hotel sink – several days!! And I burned the long dress, the mini dress, and jeans and the sweatshirt. I never wanted to see them again due to over-wearage!!

According to Dana, grandma had told us there was NO chewing gum in Germany, so Dana and Cindi each packed a bag of chewing gum.

Travel was then, as it is today, not a spur of the moment decision. (It is currently July, 2023 and I am working on trip to New Zealand in January, 2025!!)

I actually found the passport I used to get to Europe with an issue date of April 9, 1971. The outside color was pale green. I wonder when the U.S. passport color changed to navy blue.

And the answer is (oh how I love my Google), from 1926 until 1941, US citizens received red passports. After that, US passports were issued in

green. In 1976, the United States passport changed to the blue covers with which we are familiar today—the same shade found in the American flag.

In that passport, my hair color was listed as auburn. Wow!! Those were the days. Funny, I don't recall any recent important document asking my hair color. The color is a lie for almost any American women over the age of forty, anyway, and can be changed at will.

They didn't require me to list my weight, but I know it was 120. I PROUDLY can say that is exactly what I weigh today. NO! I'm am not lucky. Fat piles on me the same way it piles on everyone else. My weight stays at 120 by exercise and limiting calories every day to the certain amount which does not add pounds. Yes, I am lucky that I can eat 1,500 calories a day and not gain weight; but that has to do with the 10,000 steps I walk by 10:30 AM several mornings a week.

But I digress.

My passport also displays a difficult to read visa stamp dated May 4, 1971 which expired one year later. This must have been the visa allowing us to enter Communist Yugoslavia.

On the same page as the visa is a Luxembourg stamp dated June 14, 1971. Next to my picture is a stamp listing "Immigration" at the top and dated July 12, 1971.

Also discovered inside the passport, was a very important looking document with the title International Certificates of Vaccination, approved by the World Health Organization, issued by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Public Health Service.

The shot was listed as revaccination Dryrax 281601 Wyeth. This apparently was a small pox inoculation.

I am so old that my address on the certificate was R.R. 2 and the name of

the city. R.R. stood for Rural Route. I guess my mailman just had to know where I lived.

I found a little card, 2" x 4" sized, labeled Health Alert Notice alerting my doctor about my travel abroad and the fact if I am presenting illness, I may have been exposed to a communicable disease not usually present in the United States. Cool!

I also found a tiny business card for the hotel Tarconte. With a Google search, I find this establishment still exists north of Rome. It may have been the place we stayed after the Rome debacle. Or it may have been a place too expensive for us to stay. Not sure.

So, Gramma Gann, my mom's mom, my mom, my dad, Rick, Cindi and Dana and I crammed all our suitcases into a wood-sided station wagon (which had a backseat that faced BACKWARDS). Our family was doing Ken, a guy from my mom's workplace, a favor by driving it to and dropping it off in New Jersey where his family lived.

I have since been told by my dad that we just borrowed the car to get to and from the New York Airport; we kept it at Ken's New York home; while we were in Europe and that it was a favor to us by Ken.

I don't recall the drive to New Jersey. SURELY we did not drive straight through. What I do remember is getting to Ken's house and having a nice picnic in his backyard all afternoon and into the evening.

It had been 90° and I was warm and happy as a clam in my gauzy floor length dress. We rarely got 90° and 100° days in Minnesota; and it was usually August.

We then piled into the car, with Ken driving, and we drove through New Jersey to the JFK airport. The time of 1:20 AM sticks in my mind and it was still very hot. We drove through an area Ken was proud to show us. It was dark outside but everything on the streets were bright and neon. Could it have been Time Square? Broadway?



Anyway, we were dropped off at an airport where we waited to board a propeller Icelandic airplane.

I was so happy to be nicely dressed in my long barely-there dress. I don't know how many hours we were on the plane (probably 10 or so), but I had no idea how cold the interior of airplanes were, and froze during most the trip.

THIS may be where I developed my affinity for always being cold.

I think Cindi, Rick and I sat in one set of seats; and dad, mom and Dana sat in the bank of seats on the other side of the aisle. Dana remembers mom and dad discussing Rick and how he was not faring well with the flight.

It's an interesting thought that the youngest kid who needs to stay close to the parents hears more family gossip, since she gets to overhear the pillow talk of the parents.

I believe we all sat together and the kids were probably all sleeping when we were awakened to be told we needed to depart the plane. We were in Iceland. In those days, planes were not able to carry enough fuel to get from the U.S. to Europe without refueling.

We walked down the portable metal stairway onto the tarmac, slapped in the face by a temperature of about 32 degrees. And the wind was whipping. with bare arms, I didn't think I would live.

We walked into the tiny airport building and were greeted by shops with large plate glass windows displaying fur lined coats, caps, gloves, scarves and mittens.

Of course they were closed. It was still dark outside. We couldn't have purchased anything anyway. As previously stated, this was a budget trip. We did not get new clothes often.

What seemed like forever was probably only 45 minutes to an hour and we were back on the plane. It probably felt quite toasty after the freezing weather we marched through to get back on the plane.

We arrived in Luxembourg without incident, picked up our white 10-person van with a 4-spark plug engine, pulled up to the guy at the exit window and asked “Whoa ist Deutschland?” The man pointed, and we were off on our adventure, without nary a map.

Later in the trip, we’d ask for a map. (el mappa, my dad would plead once we were in Italy – part of the very small repertoire of Spanish/Italian that he knew).

We arrived at a “C” or “D” rated hotel. Either in Europe currently, or back in the 1970's Europe rated their hotels starting with “A” for the best. Needless to say, our “D” hotel was not your new, luxury accommodation.

One hotel had a long, long wooden floored hallway. If you had placed a marble at one end, it would have rolled to the opposite end without help.

In those days bedbugs didn’t seem to be a thing, and cockroaches didn’t live in most the climates to which we traveled. Thank goodness.

We were all excited about staying in a hotel, since as a 17-year-old girl, I had not done so in most my life.

Five minutes does not seem a long time, but if you do a back-and-forth conversation, including charades and miming, it can be quite lengthy. And that is what I watched between my mother and woman from the hotel staff at our hotel the first night in Germany.

My mother’s only language until she attended public school at age 5 was German. However, the intervening 34 years of rarely speaking German took a toll on her ability to remember the language.

We wanted a wash cloth! Mom used the word vashen often, mimed rubbing her cheeks, looked skyward in thought trying to remember any word remotely related to cloth, or rag, or towel.

Back and forth the guessing game went, both people were animated, with the staff person wanting to help so badly.

We never got those wash cloths. Turns out Germany doesn't DO wash clothes.

In my recent travels I was made aware that they STILL don't do wash clothes. And friends of mine, brought a pack of disposable ones. By the way, recently it was a big thing in Germany, Austria and Switzerland to notify us they also don't do top sheets.

We were instructed to bring our own sheet and make sure they were not white. I suppose the color is to differentiate them from the provided white bottom sheets owned by the hotel

For the weight and space it would add to my suitcase, I can do without a top sheet.

Ugly Americans, as I call them, have a uniform chorus, "Why don't they provide them; because we use them?" I have even heard the complaint that "Those [insert nationality] should speak English so we can communicate with them." Methinks Americans have the 'American Supremacy' entitlement syndrome the same as do the White Supremacists.

The next day, we drove to a little town where my mother's relatives lived.

My grandmother left Germany at the age of 26, in 1922. Her younger brother, Joe, immigrated to America before she did by having a American sponsor. He was able to come through Ellis Island with the help of the sponsor and his carpentry profession. Later, Joe sponsored

my grandmother through Ellis Island, with seamstress listed as her profession. They both settled in Baltimore but eventually moved to Minnesota.

Joe built a house for my grandmother and her husband, Oscar. It was built at 154 E. Wyoming Street in St. Paul, Minnesota. It was quite a tiny house with two bedrooms, one bathroom and a one-car garage so small that the cars of the 1970's did not fit into it.

Crazily enough, today my car, ironically named a Honda FIT, might have fit into it, unless it was too high.

The house was paid for by Oscar, and was built entirely in secret from my gramma. And, once finished, she was presented with her new home. CAN YOU IMAGINE THAT HAPPENING TODAY!?

But I digress.

My mother was not born in the 154 E. Wyoming house, but moved there when she was a little girl. It was during her pubescence living in house on Wyoming Street that her parents would send care packages to their relatives in Germany who were very poor and hungry due to the war. Two sisters my mother's age were sent used clothes and shoes from my mom, along with food and supplies. I understand this helped that family survive the war.

It was this family, probably one of the grown girls and her husband whom we visited in Germany in their home. It was rough going since they could not speak English and mom barely could speak German. It was a little dicey, dad knocking at their door and us hoping we had the correct house and them having this American guy standing at their door in front of them.

When they finally understood who mom was, they were elated to meet us and brought all of us into their home. As children, the four of us could be the most angelic, well-behaved kids in the world, in front of

others. So we sat there with smiles plastered on our faces and let them beam and thank us profusely.

We drove on to Ringelai, Germany, situated in the south east corner of Germany very near the borders of both Austria and Poland (now called Czechia or the Czech Republic). It's a tiny town in Bavaria and the Black Forest, an hour from Passau and half hour from Freyung.

The Black Forest is called Schwarzwald. Schwartz is German for black. So wald must mean a woods or forest. (But I only know Schwarzwald because I was in Germany again in 2022 and bought a deck of cards from that area with that name on it.)



This was the view at the top of the ski lift that people used in summers to get to the top of the mountain for the view of the three different countries.



We met Rosa, my grandma's niece and her husband Karl. Their son, Karli, on whom they doted, was a spoiled little teenager my age who was

away at school.

Karl and Rose lived in a lovely old house with a bakery attached next door. Every morning we would enter the house to the delicious aroma of fresh baked rolls, called semmel, or Bavarian bread rolls.



Karl owned the bakery business, and his part of the business was that at 5:00 each morning, he would transport, in his trunk, 20-gallon sized wicker baskets of semmel from the bakery to the local stores, inns and bakeries.





Karl's other job was head of the Ringelai Water Department. There are only 2,046 people in the town as of 2008. So in 1971, I'm not sure the water department wasn't just a big holding tank for water, like the girls in Petticoat Junction used to swim in, for a couple families.



Karl's job seemed pretty laid back, since he'd be finished with work by 10:30 AM.

Rosa was a large beaming woman who was so happy to see us. Her mother had passed, but she knew of my grandma via the stories her mother used to extol on her about their sisterhood.

I remember Rosa (and especially Karl, who had bought these things for her) beaming, showing us her new-fangled washing machine and a complicated stainless steel coffee machine that I had never seen before. Possibly it was like an espresso maker.

From the woman working at the sales counter of the bakery, we were given a delicious conglomeration of a small semmel, cut open with the same type of white frosting they put inside the Krispy Kreme Boston Cream donuts (or maybe it was marshmallow). Then she would smash it and hand it to us. M-m-m-m! We were over the moon with the idea you could have YOUR OWN bakery at your house and eat free goodies all the time!! We were also allowed to choose whatever candy we wanted

from the candy counter at the bakery.



Speaking of semmel – when we ate this delicious stuff with the fabulous tasting European butter, they also served wine! And Dana, aged 11, remembers being served a little also.

My sisters, Dana and Cindi, and I slept up the steep hill at the home of a friend of Rosa. After spending the evening with the family group, in the dark, we'd hike up to hill to see a woman with whom we could not communicate. She put us in one room in one double bed and all three of us went to sleep under a huge comforter they called a ticking. It was about a foot thick and filled with feathers. Did I mention it was June? But it was cold at night.

It may not have been the same bed (since my grandma was 74 – and do they keep the same beds that long?), but we slept in the very same house in which grandma was born.

Because Rosa and Carl did not speak English, we had grandma translate our discussions for us. See was 75 years old at the time and not as sharp as she probably was at 30. She would sometimes turn to us and explain the conversation to us in German. She sometimes did the same to Rosa, in English. I remember shouting the phrase many times to grandma "In



English!”



This is the view just outside that bedroom. I guess a typical scene of a small farmer in 1971. Were there really THREE people on that tractor?

One morning we gathered at Rosa and Karl's home and were allowed into the area they were baking bread. A professional baker was in charge, and Francai was a young man working there as a baker's helper. He was a little mentally slow but a very good worker. They had been working since the wee hours of the morning and flour was everywhere and the oven was hot.

Our family had jokes and we were always laughing. One morning we were all laughing and Francai stops working, looks up at us and asks “Sie lachen?” It means are you laughing? It struck us as hilarious that he would stop work and want join in on the conversation, since he couldn’t speak a lick of English nor we, German.

And to this day if I say “You laffen?” to anyone in our family, we would smile and understand, with fond memories.

One morning dad and us kids went to an elementary school. It was early June and the elementary school (schule; pronounced shoolay) was still in session. We learned our German words from our dad. Undoubtedly, the pronunciation was not accurate.

It was a tiny school with a few classrooms on large acreage of grassy land. However, that was not unusual for us, since we came from a town of 150 people; and went to 6 years of grammar school in a building with only 3 classrooms.

Dad recalls a picture of the local high school soccer team up on the wall. Half the photos were x’ed out indicating they were dead. Germany lost many, many more men in WWII than did the U.S. Even though they were our enemy at the time, it’s still sad.



The town also had a kegel alley. Kegel is Germany's bowling. The ball was much smaller than in the U.S. and a little lighter, with no holes. I just remember I wasn't much good at it. As it turns out, I wasn't much good at U.S. bowling either. My average score was 99 for years! I've since graduated to about 120.

We had gone to neighboring Passau to see the sights and apparently Karli found out we were his relatives from America. He was such a spoiled boy, he decided he'd rather see his relatives than that an important school exam and showed up in Ringelai.

Dad, Rick and Karli went to the local kegel alley and it was locked. They got the key, turned on the lights, paid a fenig and started the game. Rick being Rick, kept turning off the lights whenever Karli stated to bowl.

