

Back to our trip.

On one of the nights at this resort a band played well past midnight – loud and very American. The band was great and could sing the American songs to a “T”, specializing in Simon and Garfunkel songs, but they couldn’t speak a bit of English. Rote memorization and mimickery is amazing.

Dad and Rick were down stairs at the dance floor and I was up on our balcony enjoying the music having a glass of the booze I had purchased in a grocery store the day before. A 21-year-old drinking law was not in effect in this Communistic country. And, yes, you could buy 80 proof booze in a grocery store.

We continued south in Yugoslavia (now Croatia) to probably Zadar or a coastal city a little north of there. Since we took a ferry across the Adriatic Sea to Ancona, Italy, it seems Zadar is accurate. It sits directly across the water from Ancona.

This was a 6 (or more) hour ferry trip which included taking our vehicle on board. Our parents were not big drinkers; but would partake – and to excess once in a great while.



They grabbed deck chairs in the sun for the 6 hour tour, gave the four of us money and sent us to the diningroom for lunch.

Being poor little urchins, we didn't know nothin' 'bout courses of a meal. When we sat down to white linen tables, real silverware, stemmed water glasses, and waiters that had the little flat knife that scraped crumbs off the tablecloths, we were out of our realm.

We eagerly ate the delicious bread in the baskets which we slathered with the delicious European butter. Then plates of spaghetti and probably meatballs appeared. We cleaned our plates and were full, fat and happy.

Then the soup bowls came. We were thrilled and slurped them up.

Then, the salads. Oh, we were getting stuffed.

By the time the main entree came, Rick's eyes were bulging and he was turning a little green.

We ate it, along with the dessert. I'm sure we turned down the coffee and tea at the end.

After the hours-long ordeal we went to see the folks who were happily pickled on deck. They knew all about courses, and had a good laugh at their naive kids.

Off the ferry and ready to go we headed to Rome - a place even I had heard of and wanted to visit. Visions of the armless marble woman statue, Venus De Milo, and beautiful fountains danced in my head.

In 1971 in the main area of Rome, the statues we covered in green slime, trash, cardboard boxes and smelled of urine. Apparently men just peed on any wall available to them. It was June and it reeked. It was a sad sight for me.

We pulled into Rome later in the afternoon and started our regular search for two hotel rooms. After several tries, dad hopped into the car, discussed with mom, explained they wanted \$90 PER ROOM for the

night, we couldn't afford it and we were sleeping in the van.

We had our dinner somewhere and dad drove around town choosing the safest area he could determine. That spot turned out to be a lit street in front of a bar. Dad decided to stay up all night for safety.

I would have loved to be a fly on the wall.

It probably was about 9 pm and getting dark. Dad was in the driver's seat, mom in passenger seat with her head down trying to sleep, I was sitting directly behind dad and the other three kids were in the back laying down.

By 11 pm or so, I was still directly behind dad sitting up writing a letter to the boyfriend I left at home. The three kids were squirming and pushing each other and fighting, as was often the case at our house.

So as the inebriated Italian man walks out of the bar that he's been at all evening, he sees a white van with a man sitting still in front, a young girl behind him, no one is talking, and the van is shaking on its wheels.

It's a good thing 9/11 or more exact, the Oklahoma bombing, hadn't happened yet or the Polizia would have been called – If you see something; say something.

We were parked close to a police station and at one point in the night, we were spotted by the cops. Dad decided we had better vacate. We did, pulled around the corner to a less conspicuous spot and spent the rest of the evening.

We survived the night and continued on our tour, happy to be leaving such a dirty and expensive place.

It may have been in Rome where we were trying to get on the road, we had a map, and yet, we ended up on a city street so narrow that walls of

the buildings on both sides of our van were almost touching us.

We seriously could not get through and had to back up.

As we did in those days with only maps and no WAYS nor Google GPS navigation, we made many a wrong turn, stopped to ask for directions and finally made it out of town.

As we drove through the countryside of Italy, again, we were somewhat lost and, again, ended up on a paved highway, which became a paved road, then a dirt road and we finally had to cry uncle when we were on a grassy cow path on some farmer's acreage.

I'm sure some of these people would not have been more surprised if an alien landed on their property.

The farmer, his wife and 5 year old son were in their field when we pulled up. They spoke no English; we no Italian (except dad could always say 'el mappa').

With map in hand dad got out and tried to ask how the hell to get to a road. There was lots of pointing and hand gesturing. I'm not sure they were of any help. Maybe pointing in a general direction helped.

Mom got out and tried to ask if they would like a picture of themselves and their son, as she showed them our very fancy Polaroid INSTANT camera.

She probably showed them a picture we had taken and they were very happy to pose. They snapped the photo and waited the allotted five minutes for the photo to develop before our eyes.

They were very excited and gestured that their son had never had a photo of himself. They were elated, holding photo in hand, as we drove off.

...always happy to help promote whirled peas – um, World Peace.



Somewhere in Italy on a hot day. Yes!! Woo Hoo! It finally started getting warm. We were in southern Europe and it was July.

Our van was acting up and somewhere, somehow, we pulled into a grassy, tree-covered area where we met a man who was a mechanic.

Again, dad went into his Italian. (I'm not sure how 'el mappa' helped explain a mechanical problem.) Charades probably helped.

Dad gets out of the driver's seat to let this guy in dirty mechanics' overalls crawl down toward the van's clutch. While doing so, dad says, "Here, let me move so you can get your greasy little body down in there."

Well!! We were not a kind lot. And it was even more hilarious to know we were NOT allowed to laugh. We were silently rolling in the aisles. I always thought it was so mean to treat a man so badly who was bending over backwards to help us. But I laughed just the same.

It would seem we went from Rome to Pisa.

We were trying to get to the leaning tower of Piza and we pulled over and asked a man on the street how to get there.

He jumped into our car and said he would take us there. (I guess we hadn't invented the STRANGER DANGER rhyme as yet!)

When we arrived, a couple miles away, we tried to pay him for his troubles. He was insulted. He found someone to translate and he explained that he helped us because he was so appreciative of what the Americans did for the Italians during the war.

We don't know, but he must've have had to catch a bus back to where we picked him up.

I specifically recall Cindi and I deciding we did not want to walk up to the top of the Leaning Tower of Pisa – we'd rather shop. And by shop, I mean buying \$1 trinkets of no consequence.

It's a large regret of mine. Possibly it's the reason I like to see everything of consequence and substance in any city to which I travel. And now the only things I buy on a trip are a coffee mug with the name of the country, a deck of playing cards with pictures of the country and a cheap (\$15 maximum) pashmina (scarf).



Dad took Dana to the top of the leaning tower and tells of the way you could walk out onto the leaning floors and just fall off the edge. There were no barriers. I believe barriers are now in place, however.

I do notice in many foreign countries, safety is not a number one priority. And you'll hear me discussing OSHA many times in my trip blogs. I know OSHA is for the safety of workers, but you get my drift.

Then on to Florence.

As we drove down the autobahn we continued to see signs for many exits to Firenze. We were quite impressed that it MUST be a huge town; but we had never heard of it before. DUH! Eventually we figured out Firenze is the Italian name for Florence!!

I remember more shopping and maybe a cathedral. What I remember most are the young boys calling me up to see their wares and saying "Come pretty lady. Almost free!!" What salesmen!

While driving through town we saw a cathedral (St. Peter?) With bronze doors. When we walked into the edifice, there was a priest in the loft/rotunda upstairs with a group of little boys screaming and shouting and making a ruckus. We found it hilarious that what was to be a very solemn and religious place was awash in little kid shenanigans.

In Florence, we also found a replica of the Pieta statue, the original of which is in the Vatican.

We were staying in quite a nice hotel in some Italian town when Cindi noticed from their upper room window that a dog was digging in the gardens below. At aged 11, Dana was very much an animal lover, as she still is today. She was straining over the window sill to see the dog's actions when she decided to crawl up on the marble window sill. Big mistake! The piece of marble was twice as wide as the actual wooden/sheetrock window sill below. Since it jutted out and was only glued to the section below, when Dana stood on it, it broke, Dana fell,

and it was a mess.

I've heard this story a couple times and I never heard mention if Dana was hurt or not. It's always about the broken window sill and the trouble she caused. I believe it was in the top five awful things that has happened to her. She was mortified. Poor Dana.

Dad did the right thing (as most {of our old} tenants wouldn't bother to do). He called up the manager and paid for the damage.

And THAT was why we couldn't afford the Rome hotel and had to sleep in the van the next night! Thanks, Dana!!

Just Kidding!!all these years later, and I am still picking on that poor, sweet child!! You know I love you!!! I am jealous and in awe of you.

I don't remember a thing about Venice but dad claims that as we drove into town, it was off our route to Switzerland and he told all of us "The first one to see a canal, let us know". When it happened, we looked at it and then we turned around and got back on the road back to Germany to pick up grandma.

It was somewhere in the mountains we found that the 4-piston engine, filled with luggage and 7 people was not powerful enough to get us to the top of some steep roads. The van had a clutch, so sometimes we would continue to downshift while driving slowly upward, when dad would announce we were on our last gear.

We never really totally stopped because the engine could no longer haul us up the mountains, but we would pull over into the areas specially built for slower traffic to let the fast traffic go by.

Somewhere driving into Austria from Italy we were following a map, going slowly up the mountain when the roads stopped. No road left!! We pulled into a line of vehicles and we all looked at each other. We waited quite some time and then things began to happen.

I don't remember how we ended up backwards on the train, but dad held out some European money (it wasn't yet Euros – there were ten types of monies for the ten countries we visited), drove onto a train car and waited. Soon the train car began to move and we found ourselves sitting in the van, backwards, on a train in the pitch dark.

It seemed like forever but it was many, many minutes that we arrived outside the other side of the mountain!! Dad says we thought we were in Switzerland, but it turned out we were not.

What a way to travel!! ...by the seat of our pants; or rather in the seat of our van!!

That evening we were in a restaurant with a vista view of the snowy Alps. Just breathtaking. We were mid meal when my mom started to talk about a headache. Soon she was holding her head and the center of attention. It got so bad her head was bowed and she started to cry.

We were helpless in what to do. A gentleman, who had been eating dinner with a woman, walked over to mom and handed her a pill. I don't think he spoke English because we never found out if he was a doctor, or just possibly someone who suffered the same altitude sickness. We didn't even know what the medication was.

At that point mom would have done anything to stop the pain, and swallowed the pill.

The couple left before we realized how much he had helped mom. And he remains in our family's folklore as the Angel of the Alps who saved our mom and we send him love.

The moral of the story: Always help out where you can. You never know when good karma or mojo will follow you a lifetime because of the simple act you provided.

Again, we kept seeing signs for the Donau River. Again, we finally

figured out it the the Danube River – spelled differently in every country we visited.

We drove through Switzerland and on to Liechtenstein – one of the smallest countries in the world. (The Vatican in Italy, home of the pope, is the smallest.) It is also one of the only double land-locked countries. (Uzbekistan is a second).

Landlocked means the country does not have a coastline or seaport. So double landlocked means the country does not have a coastline and is surrounded by countries who also do not have a coastline

Dad made it a big deal that we could drive through a whole country in minutes. We made a stop, maybe at an informational spot, but definitely a souvenir shop. I remember Dana buying a little wooden dog. It was tiny pieces of wood all strung together with elastic thread so that you could push the bottom and depending which side you pushed, it would dance and bow and dip. It came home with us and hung around for many years.

I was just in Houston and I saw that little figurine for sale in a tourist shop. I should have taken a picture!!

On to Ringelai, Germany, to pick up grandma and head to the Netherlands.

Grandma is the one on the left.



Gramma and mom are on the right in the second photo.



We probably drove thru Nuremberg and this is where we stopped shortly to see the ground where thousands of Jews, Catholics, LGBTQ+, and mentally ill people were annihilated because Hitler and his Nazis felt these people lesser than they. Again, the arrogance of white people!

The city of Dusseldorf rings a bell. It makes sense we drove through this city, because it's right on the way to Amsterdam.

Just thought of spending, and our money. We all had our own money. When we crossed into a country, I would go to a money exchange kiosk or bank and get some local money. Of course in addition to the exchange rate, there was a fee for switching the money. I would spend a little of it and then exchange that money for the money of the next country; with an exchange fee. Upon entering the next country; another fee. You get the drift. So by the time I entered the tenth country, I probably had spent most my money on exchange fees.

Today every one of the ten countries deal in Euros as their national currency. It would have been so much easier.

I did get math practice in each country. I still remember that there was 4 German Marks to a dollar back then. Now a Euro is worth \$1.12. WOW! Italy was fun because we had paper money with 1,000's on it. It was lira then.



We arrived in Amsterdam, sadly made famous by Anne Frank, a Jewish girl who was in hiding from the Nazis with her and a neighboring family for two years, while she kept a diary of everything that happened to her in that cramped space during those years, and her thoughts about humankind. She felt people were basically good.

Spoiler Alert! Her father is the only one of the group who survived. A woman grabbed the diary from its hiding place once the gestapo raided their hideaway. It was kept safe until a time when it was gifted to Anne's father. A book was published at a later date as one of the many, many situations created so we would NEVER FORGET!! If we don't remember the past atrocities, we are destined to repeat them.

Dad taught fourth grade for many years, and I would think The Diary of Anne Frank was required reading. And what dad's students learned, his own children learned by osmosis from discussions at the dinner table while he talked to mom.

We were inside the building in which Anne Frank hid for two years, standing in line to crawl up the hidden staircase into a hidden two-room attic, when hyperactive brother Rick, bumped into the women in front of

us. It caused a little stir. When the woman turned around to look at us, her eyes grew large and she asked if he taught school at _____. Dad said “No, I teach at Vista View Elementary”. Recognition lit her eyes and she realized dad had been her child’s teacher before she moved away.

Big excitement and introductions all around. Rick had to apologize and all was well.

This reminds me, we were in line at some museum when a large woman and her children unceremoniously barged in front of us in the line. Dad turned to the four of us kids and said “Now kids, I need you to let this cow go in front of us. She’s obviously in a hurry.” Of course we were over the moon trying not to laugh out loud, when the woman’s husband, following her and the kids, leaned in to dad and said “We’re from Chicago”. Lesson learned: Don’t assume people can’t understand you.

However, maybe she’d be a little more courteous in the future.

I am sure we saw fields and fields of tulips while we were in Amsterdam and Belgium. I wonder if we saw any dykes holding the ocean back from the land, since the Netherlands is UNDER sea level – as is part of New Orleans!

Somewhere in Belgium, we pulled out our blanket, threw it over the railroad tracks and set up our lunch fixins’. Dad warned us to be careful because pee and poop came out of the rail cars of the passing trains. That’s just the way they disposed of train sewerage in those days.

When grandma heard that she stood up, refused to eat lunch, and said she was going to the car. My mom did the same thing. So we all packed up the lunch and drove to France – without eating lunch.

Another time, dad remembers Rick finding a discarded magazine at our lunch picnic spot which turned out to be porn. Life is just crazy.

Before heading to the Luxembourg Airport, we drove just across the border of France and got the usual French treatment.

We couldn't speak French and they certainly weren't going to try to speak English with us, to make it easier.

We got a hotel and two black men came hustling out of the hotel to help carry all our bags into the hotel.

This was 1971, who woulda' thought these two guys were not the 'help'. Well, they were not. They were visiting professors from Africa somewhere, who were just happy to see new faces and to speak English.

Dad and Rick spent the rest of the day and evening hanging out with them.

After unpacking, we went downstairs to the restaurant and tried to order some cold cuts, cheese and bread for the 7 of us. The older waitress was not helpful in any way, in that they arrived with trays and trays of meats, cheeses, etc. It was WAY more than we needed and we paid way more than we needed also.

I have always felt she did it on purpose.

Dad and Rick hung with the black professors all evening.

I don't recall packing for home – of course we never really unpacked. I don't remember getting to the Luxembourg Airport and having to drop off the van, I don't remember grandma being there, and I don't remember the flight home nor the drive home. Was I smart enough to bring a sweater on the plane with me this time? Don't know.

I'm sure grandma came home to Lydia with us. But that may not be the case either, because her home in St. Paul was not too far from the airport.

I don't remember arriving at home nor any feelings about the trip.

OH! I do remember all seven of us arriving, probably, in New York, probably JFK Airport. In addition to our little suitcases and mom and dad's big suitcase, we had brown paper bags of our trinkets and souvenirs. We also had a Bavarian coo-coo clock for which we did NOT want to pay tax.

We were sweating immigration and passport control, as they call it now. We were in line with everyone else getting off the plane when a woman in an airport uniform came to us, pulled us out of the line and asked about declaring any valuables we had purchased.

She peeked into a couple bags and decided we were just innocuous and innocent country hicks of a family and showed us to the exit.

Afterwards we let out a sigh of relief and I decided if we WERE ever going to smuggle diamonds, drugs or bombs, we would haul around our young family.

It doesn't make me feel good that the inspection authorities could be so naive. And I don't remember dogs at the airport, as I have seen in Galapagos Islands, Australia, and Atlanta.

Inspections are for MY protection; and I don't mind them unless they make me late for my flight, or go awry and I end up in the slammer.

These days I have Global Entry. When I had my face-to-face interview they asked that I promise not to bring illegal and unallowed things into the country. I promised; and since then, after the machine takes my picture by my just standing near the kiosk (!!), the guard calls me by my first name, welcomes me into the United States and never asks any questions. Sweet!! That's worth the \$100 fee right there!

Again, I digress.

I do remember getting back into my junior/senior summer and turning my attention to graduating, college, and of course boys; never to dwell heavily on those family-filled five weeks of my life.

Except, of course, “You laffen?” has cropped in our family discussions at least once a decade since, and we all laugh.

I did burn some of those often-worn clothes, though.

I hope you have enjoyed this rendition of why I probably am hooked on traveling – it’s an experience like no other.

Now I am off to Nepal and Bhutan and I realize it will be a 31 hour span of time for air travel – NOT counting the 3 hours early arrival and waiting for luggage at the end, catching a van home and another short car ride. So I figure it will require 37 hours of my life to get to where I wanna go!! But so WELL WORTH IT!!

Linda Jeanne