

Dad took this picture as we were walking to church. It was from left, grandma, Cindi, Rick and mom. Don't know where I or Dana was. At the time, Dad was an agnostic and didn't go to church. Today, he's 'progressed' and is an Atheist.



I recall going out to the street in the early evening after dinner and teenage boys were being cool on their little bikes with banana seats. (Remember them?) The boys didn't speak English, but they sure knew how to say "I luff you. Weel you go to bed weeth me?" And they all thought it hilarious. I was glad my sisters were near.

At some point we were taken to a Goebel Glass Factory. For more than 140 years the name of the brand as well as the name Goebel itself stands for a high quality and outstanding craftsmanship. This famous porcelain manufacturer is located in Rödental (in the northern part of Bavaria) where his unique products are designed and manufactured.

I knew we went to the glass factory since we were each allowed to choose one item. Dana still has the piece of glass she selected!

I thought each of the items we chose were cut glass. But the most famous part about Goebel was their manufacture of Hummel Figures. And now it makes so much sense why grandma collected them and why my mom and my grandma talked about them so much. They became collectors items and increased in value – and were darling ceramic pieces depicting German and Swiss children and sweet settings.

Hummel figurines (or simply Hummels) are a series of porcelain figurines based on the drawings of Maria Innocentia Hummel.

The sketch art of Maria Innocentia Hummel began to appear in the 1930s in Germany and Switzerland, mostly pastoral drawings of children. The German art publisher Ars Sacra was involved in the early

popularization of the art on postcards. Hummel's "art cards" became popular throughout Germany, catching the eye of Franz Goebel, porcelain maker and head of W. Goebel Porzellanfabrik. Goebel acquired rights to turn Hummel's drawing into figurines, producing the first line in 1935. By the end of the year, 46 M.I. Hummel motifs were on the market, sold in America at Marshall Field & Co. of Chicago and other American retailers.

After the end of World War II, the popularity of Hummel figurines grew as American soldiers stationed in West Germany began sending the figurines home as gifts. Nostalgia associated with the figurines and the U.S. soldiers buying them led to Hummel figurines becoming a popular collector's item. Popularity increased even more when the figurines were sold by the Army PX system. As travel to Europe became more commonplace, the figurines, with their folkloric appearance, were often purchased as souvenirs. A vibrant speculator market in Hummel figurines developed in the 1970s, and Hummel figurines skyrocketed in price.

Huh! I had been to a famous place – and didn't even realize it. I am SURE with all my current travels, the same has occurred!

Gramma was so happy to be back home. She was born in Ringelai, sailed to America at age 26 and had only been back four or five times over the next 48 years. We left her with her niece, nephew and memories, and the six of us set off to our European adventure!

As a little girl of six or nine living on the farm in Lydia, I remember my gramma crawling into my double bed with me in the middle of the night at our farm with the explanation she had just gotten back from Germany. I didn't understand that Germany was a country far away and the airport was only 50 minutes from our house. I also didn't understand why it had to be in the middle of the night.

Another thing I remember about gramma is how I loved for her to scratch my back while we were in bed together. I have never connected

the two, but to this day, I get a massage every week. I'll think of grandma going to my next appointment.

Again, I digress.

I have only a vague idea of our European travel route and what we saw; however I have many memories of our family interactions while crammed into our white 10-passenger van, luggage included.

We visited ten countries in total. I only know for sure that we visited Yugoslavia mid trip, traveled through a mountain on a train onto which we drove our van, thinking we came out in Switzerland but we were still in Austria, and that another town just inside the French border was one of the last places to which we traveled before heading back to the airport.

I have no recollection of grandma being in the van with us (she must have been a very good passenger). We must have picked her up in Germany on our way to the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Luxembourg.

I have reconstructed the following route. We flew on Icelandic Airlines into Luxembourg, then on to Germany, to the border fence of Communist Czechoslovakia (now Czech Republic), Salzburg, Austria, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia (now called Slovenia and Croatia), Rome, Florence, and Pisa, Venice, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, back to Ringelai to get grandma, The Netherlands, Belgium, France and flew out of Luxembourg. Did you know there is a Luxembourg City in Luxembourg?

And an interesting ride it was!

I don't remember squabbling and fighting among the kids as we usually did at home. By 17, I was organically growing out of it already; and I suppose it was the newness every day and the fact it was "us against the world" that made us a very cohesive and close-knit unit.

More memories and thoughts of Ringelai. It was like going back in time. Things had not changed in all the years since grandma left except for the upgraded appliances of which they were so proud.

Ringelai is situated in the southeast corner of Germany very near the border of Czechoslovakia and Austria.

I grew up knowing about the holocaust and the slaughter of 7 million people. Not only Jews were killed, although they made up the majority of the group. LGBTQ+ (called homosexuals back then), Jehovah's Witnesses, Gypsies, Catholics, Romans, disabled people, and the list goes on and on, were also meant to be completely exterminated by the Nazis. I say Nazis because I am sure all Germans did not believe in exterminating entire groups of people in order to have a world of near-perfect human beings. I am sure even some of the dumber Nazis just went along with their fearless leader, not realizing the full depth of what Hitler was doing.

In my twenties, I used to ask grandma about the atrocities in Germany and whether they could smell the odor of rotting flesh. She always said they smelled nothing and knew nothing about what was happening.

I now realize that if she came to the U.S. at 26, it was 1922 at her first crossing. The SS didn't start the most heinous death camp crimes until 1933, when it was only to kill political opponents. It was only in 1941 the SS started using gassing vans (where they would lock people in vans and kill them with carbon monoxide). Soon after that many, many death camps were built in Poland, Germany, Lithuania, Netherlands, Estonia and France. I don't think any were closer than 2 hours from Ringelai.

But still, if that stuff was going on two hours from my home I think word would have gotten to me. However, in their defense, I would probably have just sat and watched and listened (and done not much) as I have done watching our own U.S. Presidents get elected to help or harm our country and its allies.

I do remember driving into a now barren piece of land that was a concentration camp. It may have had a front gate, but it was just bare land. I was not worldly enough at the time to feel the same anguish and suffering of the humans who lived and died on that soil.

I recall it was a drab day. Or maybe it was early morning or just before the fall of evening. Not sure there were other people around. If so, there were few.

Sorry to move to this tragic memory of the human race, but truth is truth and we cannot forget. NEVER FORGET!! NEVER FORGET!!

On our way into Austria, we drove to the border of Czechoslovakia. We parked and all got out of the van and walked to the fence. I remember barbed wire and huge signs that said WARNING!! I believe it was Achtung! And then more in German or Czech explaining that no one was allowed across the border without proper papers.

Do you know the guttural moan/scream of horror of a mother watching her child die and not being able to stop it? Well, I think I heard a couple of those shouts that scared me to death. When I looked up at the commotion, I saw my brother hopping BACK over the fence to the German side while we all almost passed out from relief that the guards in the guard towers did not shoot him dead.

.....and so began our journey through ten countries of Europe.

It sounds daunting, but as my dad points out, all of the ten European countries can be fit into the size of Texas. Yes, Texas is large; but when you have a month to traverse it, it's not a bad trip.

We continued to stay in two "C" and "D" hotel rooms every night by pulling into a town and seeking them out. I'm not sure how that was arranged, except for driving around looking or asking strangers for directions.



There was no Orbitz or Expedia hotel search service on our World Wide Web on which to click and reserve, like we have today. There was no WAYS to find our GPS directions to a specific location. There was no establishments taking credit cards for payments. There was no Googling “The Ten Best Things to Check Out When You Are In [insert city]”.

Mostly, we were greeted with a happy smile and excitement to meet an American family crazy enough to haul their kids to Europe. And we paid for things and services in cash.

Since I was the seamstress in the family, dad had me sew a zippered pouch of white cloth that he strapped around his stomach under his clothes. Money was sewn into several sections of the belt and it would be cut open as we spent the cash.

I didn't pay much attention to it, but at the beginning of the trip there must have been a huge wad of cash in that pack. I remember traveler's Cheques being available while I was in my 30's for safe traveling. This is now a joke and no one accepts them. I'm not sure the little books that

you would tear out pages one at a time were around back in the 70's. If so, I'm sure that was crammed into the white money belt also.

I remember much discussion about Passau, on the southwest corner of Germany. So we were probably there.

I know we were in Salzburg, Austria, because we discovered the salt mines by happy accident. (Duh! thus the name.)

We paid our money, donned the black cloth Amish-like hats and outfits, straddled little tram seats, two people on each, and started our tiny train trip down, down, down into a deep and dark and cool cave in the ground.

Ancient Celts mined salt here back in 400 BC. I believe it had been mined out and was now just a tourist site, but it was the coolest thing, especially when you had no idea where you were going and what you would see.

At the bottom we got off the little tram. It was a huge cavernous space, cool and damp. There were twenty or forty people on the tour and we then sat on a slide and slid down to an even lower area.

I don't remember anything about how and why they needed salt, other than before refrigeration salt was what was used to preserve food from spoiling.

Dad recalls a hotel we stayed in, in a city called something-something On Mien. I guess we rented a room, but Rick stayed in a garage. Once you opened the garage door you could smell the the mildew. He slept on the floor of that garage under a heavy ticking (a down-filled giant pillow) so that with his head and feet sticking out, he looked like a hotdog.

Breakfast might have been provided in our hotel stays and we lunched on food we bought in grocery stores and food markets, either in the van or on the side of the road, or in parks or city benches. We had a big

blanket we threw on the ground, hauled all the food we had just purchased, or what was left over from days before, and had a nice picnic.

I remember the delicious semmel, thinly sliced lunch meats, and cheese all assembled into a great sandwich. We weren't big on copious amounts of vegetables, so not sure it involved lettuce, tomato or onion. We probably had the fruits that were in season and reasonably priced.



Here is one of those picnic areas on the side of the road. There is my windbreaker – almost as long as my pink minidress and yes, I was wearing a wig – my pride and joy. Cindi had a white wind breaker coat she wore everywhere also. You see her getting out of the van.

Somewhere in Germany or Austria, dad asked if we wanted some cookies from a woman at a kiosk or shop. Of course we did! Always, when it involved sweets, the answer was yes. We inherited a HUGE sweet tooth from dad who taught us there should always be dessert. (He now eats three desserts at almost every meal).

So in his broken German/Austrian – which I think is also German – the baker asked how many and dad said “Two kilos”. Not sure he was



thinking clearly, in that we ended up with 4.4 pounds of Gerber Baby-type biscuit cookies! They were housed loosely in a plastic bag placed into a large cardboard box.

We happily pulled out the box and ate them, to finish off many of our lunches. But four pounds is a lot and we were no longer thrilled to eat those cookies. In fact, somewhere in Austria or Germany, at a palatial castle and grounds we discovered a flock of swans in the long, long manicured pool. Someone, brilliant I might add, had the best notion that those swans may love cookies.

The cardboard box came out one last time and we happily fed the fowl the last of the cookies and fed the box to the dumpster.

From Austria we headed south to Communist Yugoslavia – into warm weather! Woo-hoo!

For dinners, we usually ate at a restaurant. Sometimes it was part of the hotel package at which we were staying.

Being kids, our favorites at a restaurant was French fries and 7-Up. We learned that sometimes the names for these delicacies was pomme frits and Zitrone. So every evening, we'd order pomme fritts and Zitrone. Half the time we would hit the lottery and get French fries and 7-Up. The other half we'd get hash browned potatoes and lemonade. Either way, we were happy to be able to eat something familiar to us.

Dana used to order a glass of milk (remember she was 11 years old), and often it arrived as warm goat milk. UUGGHH!

One late evening after driving a long time and then getting into our hotel, we walked to a local restaurant. I think it was in the backyard of someone's home. We ordered a salad (salat?) And the fish. Maybe on the menu it was listed as smoked fish, maybe grilled, who knows!

I was even a fussy eater back in those days. But salads were something I

liked to eat. We had our salads. But when I found a slimy, squishy SLUG on the back side of a piece of my lettuce my world fell apart. It was years before I could eat another salad without picking up each piece of lettuce and inspecting both sides for unwanted vermin!

After the salads we waited, and waited, and waited. It was over an hour.

I knew the chef (and owner) was doing something on the outdoor grill; but what a shock when he arrived with six whole fish, apparently smoked on that grill.



Mom was quite the task master at making me eat what was served me and in a civilized manner. I'm sure I picked and poked and ate little pieces of fish meat that didn't come from parts too close to the lungs, heart, eyeballs. UGH! What a crazy night. And it turned out to be quite expensive to top it off.

I probably rued the day we tossed out those cookies!!

Dad recalls that none of us ate that fish since it reeked of kerosene.

When we arrived at the Adriatic Sea off the coast of Yugoslavia, we bargained a good price for a 3-day stay at their resort. The resort included dinner every evening.

It was across a main street and then a hundred yards to the water.

A couple things I remember about that trip.

Living in Minnesota, probably as far from an ocean as a United Statesian can get, the sea was magic!! Hot. Sunny. Warm sand. We could actually spend an entire afternoon in our swim suits. Heaven! The beach was clothing optional and the only person I remember nude was a

woman in her fifties with a big hanging stomach and boobs, and floppy ass. She was sitting in the sand. (Yuck).

When dad didn't make a fuss, neither did we. We continued to enjoy our beach vacation. We felt like rich people.

Dad now claims he never even noticed the naked woman.

As an aside and speaking of rich, it was into our 60's that "the kids" as we called our four core group of siblings, apparently, did not realize we were poor growing up. We had an in-ground pool and a trampoline and, for them, that was enough proof of our richness. I reminded them of one pound-of-hamburger-to-feed-nine-people hotdish, hand-me-down clothes, no meals at restaurants, used cars, etc. They just didn't realize it. It was a sign of wonderful parenting.

There was a big slide in the sea at the resort for the enjoyment of anyone who wanted to slide down and end up in the water. Brother, Rick, slid down and lost his glasses. Normally this would not be a huge deal. But Rick is legally blind without glasses – and this is the REASON he was wearing them on the slide – probably to see the slide.

Luckily, he was able to find them again!! Catastrophe avoided.

This is where dad almost drowned. Rick went into the rental place on the beach where they had a pingpong table. Rick played a kid in pingpong and won. The kid got his big brother and beat Rick. Rick got dad, and dad beat the big brother. So the big brother got the lifeguard to play dad and promptly kicked dad's butt. He even could bounce the pingpong ball off his bare feet.

The next day dad got a raft from the lifeguard (free) to play in the Adriatic Sea. Dad got caught in a rip current and was being pulled out to sea. Dad really couldn't swim. He panicked, refused to call for help, paddled like crazy and was totally exhausted when he got back to the shore.

I am so grateful for my life, when I realize how things COULD HAVE GONE – in a bad, bad way!! We are glad dad lived to tell about it and hit the fine old age of 95!!

Mom had a stomach issue. It was probably something like irritable bowel syndrome but they hadn't invented a name for those things back in the day.

We were all in our swimsuits, walking across and road toward the beach. It was 100 yards to the sand and poor mom decided she HAD to poop and RIGHT NOW.

There was some quick decisions made and she ran into the sand dune and sea oats, squatted and pooped. Well, we were all appalled and thought it hilarious at the time same. ....it must have been, since I remember it to this day.

Included in our stay at this resort was dinner. Of course we had learned no German and besides, this was Yugoslavia with a different language. Our waiter was a tall young man in his twenties and he went through hell trying to make us happy with our meal selections.

Of course our main goal was french fries and 7-UP.

Mom spoke some German and so did the Yugoslavian-speaking waiter. Of course, that did not include an array of menu/food words.

So the first meal was just asking for something on the menu and praying. But by the second evening, we worked out a system. As the waiter brought others their meals, he would discreetly swing by our table and point to each item and list its name.

That way we could see what we were ordering. I guess menus didn't have pictures on them in those dinosaur days.

It worked out well. Of course, we were never able to order anything that

someone else in the room hadn't ordered that evening.

I had learned to sew an apron in seventh grade; so by eleventh grade I was sewing clothes for myself and my sisters. Both the mini and the maxi dresses were in style and Cindi and I thought nothing of wearing one of each to go into town.

As we walked down the street, people in front of us would turn around, eye us up and down, and then start animatedly talking a mile a minute. This was well within our earshot. Of course, we had no idea what they were saying in their Yugoslavian language, but we could have pretty well guessed.

We were naive and it didn't occur to us this may have put us in some peril. I always thought that if I was true and honest, nothing would happen to me. Duh!

Speaking of naive, Cindi and I went walking around Ljubljana in Yugoslavia after dinner. Of course we stuck out like a sore thumb among the locals.

We caught the eye of two cute boys in their twenties who sidled over to us to try out their English. They were good enough that we could have a conversation.

They were very excited to meet us and wanted to take us up to the wall for a drink. We were excited too. The wall was the fortress wall around the city built for protection centuries before.

We were supposed to be back to the hotel by a certain time, so we told them we had to go check in with our parents. They thought it was fine and followed us back to the hotel. We all came through the revolving door and toward the elevator when the hotel manager started animatedly telling us to stop.

There was some fast and furious discussion between the manager and the

boys. But the manager could not speak English. Lots of hand movements, etc.

Finally, it was decided, somehow, that mom and dad would come down to the lobby.

They did so, talked a little to the boys and let us go out.

Apparently the manager thought we were hookers (we probably looked like it) and thought we were using the hotel for a hook-up.

Of course, now it seems hilarious, because we were virgins and didn't even KNOW what call girls/prostitutes were!!

We had a nice evening trying to communicate. We did walk up to the wall that had been the fortress and safety of this city hundreds of years before. I don't remember if we had drinks but I remember sitting on the grass in front of the concrete wall just talking.

One boy told me he worked in a hospital or clinic and he gave me a glass vial of liquid and told me it was ..... don't remember. Maybe morphine? But I kept it and thought it was a dangerous thing to have.

I just went looking for it in my childhood jewelry box and it was missing.

It will remain a mystery.

I do remember kissing this guy and telling him "I have to go". After several tries, I realized he didn't know what 'have to' meant and I moved on to "I must go." We left with a sad heart.

I don't remember his name, which was a start in a long line of my picking up guys, enjoying their company, and never remembering their names. Wild times.