

## 13 Austria--Tranquil Idyll

Venice, Italy, to Innsbruck and Kirchberg, Austria  
Tuesday, May 11

We were eating a quick breakfast of hard boiled eggs and bread with jam by 6:30 A.M. An hour later we pulled out of Camp Fusina heading north on a good highway through the agricultural region of Venetia. Not long on the road, Neil asked for a showing of hands of those desiring accommodations in London. While in Innsbruck on our lunch break, he would telex our requests to the Sundowners' office in London.

Our morning drive through many vineyards reminded me of parts of California's rich San Joaquin Valley where I had lived as a child. I could now understand why so many Italians had settled there.

As we passed farms and towns, I wondered if I would ever put down roots in any one spot again. The overland had proven a crash course in travel that practically sent me reeling, yet, even as we neared our destination, I longed to see more places, meet more people and experience more cultures.

I continued to ponder my future. What was I going to do when I returned to the United States? From what my father and sister, also in the teaching profession, related in their letters, there were no longer teaching positions in Marin County and very few in neighboring counties. In Marin, student enrollment had declined to such a degree that teachers were being dismissed and schools were closing. With my father and his wife planning to move to Oregon, one sister married and the other soon to marry, would Marin have the appeal for me that it once had? Perhaps I would move back to Kansas; my mother would surely love the company.

My thoughts were interrupted as we began ascending the Alps and the scenery started changing dramatically. Driving over breathtaking Brenner Pass affording views of valleys with villages hundreds of feet below was the most thrilling part of the day. Neil noted that this pass, shared by both Italy and Austria, was the lowest of the main passes through the Alps. It had been named for the Italian village near its 4495 foot summit. In ancient times, the Romans had marched through it on their northerly conquests; and in modern history, it played a strategic role during World War II, for it was the shortest overland route between Italy and Germany and was the site for meetings between Hitler and Mussolini. Therefore, it was the target for Allied bombings.

Neil also told us that the pass' highway was considered one of Europe's greatest engineering feats. Built through tunnels, over bridges and hugging the mountainsides, it is able to remain open the year round despite the heavy snows.

Crossing the border with ease, we were soon greeted by Austria's lovely Tirol province, offering varied and refreshing shadings of green. The inspiring and captivating beauty motivated us to take photos through the bus windows of the dominating snow-capped peaks, sloping grassy fields, verdant woods and the jewel-like villages nestled deep in the valleys.

It was apparent that Austrian farmers take great care and pride in their fields of grass which were in excellent condition. Having never before observed such hilly green vastness, I was awed by this phenomenon. We learned from Neil that the grass is green all year round due to the fact that it is cut just before the first snow. This cut grass when covered with snow insulates the new grass which will spring forth brilliantly green when the snow melts.

Neil told us a story about another Australian bus group who became so obsessed by the luxuriant grass that they stopped to ask a farmer if they could use his field for a soccer game. He agreed, perhaps not fully understanding the implication of the request, and the game began. However, the farmer soon became incensed by the ensuing damage to his grass and told the Aussies to leave.

Low lying clouds soon covered the mountains bringing a gentle rain. Descending into the valley of the Inn River, Neil pointed out the ski jump on the outskirts of Innsbruck used in the 1976 Winter Olympics. Arriving in this picturesque city around noon, we parked in a public parking lot and were given ninety minutes for

lunch, drinking and sightseeing on our own.

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After changing our liras and travelers checks into shillings, Nino, Tanya, Jen and I were unable to agree financially on a restaurant. We were distressed by Austria's high prices, so each went our separate ways through the rainy streets of Innsbruck. Nevertheless, I found a cozy coffee shop and enjoyed a delicious apple strudel, vanilla ice cream and coffee while observing the locals having their lunches. I then quickly browsed through several shops displaying fine furniture, elegant crystal and lovely fabrics before returning to the bus.

Cold and damp inside the now steamy bus, we continued eastward. Fifty miles farther on, bright sunshine broke through as we approached the peaceful village of Kirchberg. Here chalets dotted the surrounding hills where dark green groves of conifers contrasted with fields of lighter greens making a panorama of incomparable beauty.

In these tranquil surroundings, Neil had arranged for us to spend two nights at the Club Habitat Chalet. He told us that we would probably be one of the last Australian bus groups to afford the privilege of staying so near the famous and fashionable ski center of Kitzbühel. Because of inflation, many former frequenters of Saint Moritz, Switzerland, had been flocking to ski at Kitzbühel, causing prices here to rise accordingly.

Graeme parked the bus in a public parking lot; and, loaded down with our bags, we set out for a five minute walk past other chalets to ours. In front of the four story hospice was a low

wide stone wall paralleling a rushing stream fed by melting snow from higher altitudes.

We were cordially greeted at the door by the owner-manager, an American from Philadelphia. Formerly an engineer in Iran, he was now retired in Kirchberg. With a hired Austrian cook and two Australian girls who acted interchangeably as maids and waitresses, the chalet was in capable hands.

Neil, assigning us rooms, told us that showers and toilets were on each floor. Boris, Lesly, Carol and I were elated with our small second story room with knotty pine walls, built-in bunkbeds, bright red wood furniture, blue carpeting, red and white checkered curtains and a sink. Our window opened onto a deck and framed a postcard view of a church spire silhouetted against the distant lofty peaks. The sound of the rushing stream and the brisk mountain air only added to our great happiness in being here.

After unpacking, some of the group took hikes or toured the village, but I showered and rested before dinner. Around 7 P.M., we all congregated in the dining room on the first floor. The comfortable room was furnished with sturdy wooden tables, benches and chairs. Here we were served a very good American meal of seasoned hamburger patties, mashed potatoes, cooked vegetables and strawberry Jell-O with cream. Lingering on after dinner, we enjoyed drinking Viennese coffee and discussing our London plans. Adding to the flavor of the evening, Neil circulated several tiny glasses of sweet Austrian schnapps for us to taste.

Kirchberg  
Wednesday, May 12

Awaking to sunshine around 7 A.M., it looked as though we were in for perfect weather, though a bit on the cool side. At 8:30, I joined the group for a hearty breakfast of orange juice, fried eggs, shoestring potatoes, toast and coffee.

Today would be our own, so after eating, Tanya with some of the girls and fellows took a chair lift ride to a village on a higher mountain several miles away. Nino took a solitary hike into the hills and I joined Jen and Eileen for a look around Kirchberg.

The village of neat chalets and buildings adorned with flowering window boxes was immaculately clean but seemed deserted. At the post office, we bought postage stamps of Austrian scenes and mailed our letters and cards. Next we stopped at a small restaurant where a pretty dark-haired girl wearing a traditional costume with a starched white apron politely greeted us and served us scrumptious pastries and coffee. We then visited a modern supermarket where we bought salami, cheese, bread and milk for our lunch.

On our way back to the chalet, we explored the interior of a well preserved baroque church and its cemetery. The property's excellent maintenance reflected again Austria's pride in maintaining her natural and man-made beauty.

Back at the chalet, we picnicked astride the low stone wall watching the gushing stream below. Afterwards, Jen and Eileen took off for a hike and I returned to my room to rest. In thirty

minutes, my roommate returned, which motivated me to go for lunch.

For the night.

minutes, my roommates returned, which motivated me to look further for solitude.

I started out for the higher pastures, crossing the foot-bridge over the stream and took a winding road occasioned by almond trees, their blossoms carpeting the ground. The higher I climbed, the smaller the village became and the more magnificent the panorama. Crossing a flower-sprinkled pasture riddled with rivulets, I headed toward a grove of pines which hid me from the chair lift above. Here I could totally absorb God's beauty and thank Him for allowing me to take this trip of trips. Now I could appreciate the fact that I had been one of those jobless American teachers, for by this very plight, I had become a world traveler. I could now relate to the verses from Isaiah 55:8-9:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither  
are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts  
than your thoughts.

I was just beginning to grasp the concept that His plan for my life was far superior to my own. to my own.

As the sun began to set behind the mountains, I watched a farmer lead his well-groomed cows from a pasture to his chalet. I then retraced my steps to our chalet where an American style barbecue-picnic was in progress. We served ourselves from a table laden with barbecued chicken and spareribs, baked beans,

salads and bread with a choice of soft drinks or beer.

The chill of the evening sent us inside to the dining room for dessert. Neil had bought three small cakes which were placed on a table designated for another birthday girl. Josi had turned twenty. After we sang "Happy Birthday," she was presented a card and a bouquet of wild flowers. The manager played records by American and European pop groups as we enjoyed the cake and coffee. Shortly after finishing dessert, I left the party to shower and pack for West Germany.