NIDA TRIP TO EUROPE - JULY 2000

History

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Our trip to Greece and Germany in 1998 was such a pleasant journey that Jean and I decided to do another with many of the same group from our church. Dr. Jim Higgins, and his wife, Pam, tour host, bus captain and fearless leaders for the last two trips abroad, once again hosted this trip, the Grand Europe Odyssey.

This trip began in Atlanta, GA, 17 July and our flight to Paris had a short stop in Washington, DC. Upon arriving in Paris at about 11:00am 18 July, we were met by a representative of Educational Opportunities Tours and taken by bus to our hotel, the Tulip Inn Paris Quai de Seine. We had a very nice view of the Seine River and would stay here for the next three nights. A bus tour of the city consumed most of the afternoon as we got an overview of Paris. During the next two days we would visit the Eiffel Tower, Champs-Elysees avenue, the Arc de Triomphe, the Louvre, Notre-Dame Cathedral, Napoleonâ€™s tomb, Palace of King Louis XIV, the Opry House and Versailles.

The cosmopolitan pulse of Paris beats strongest along the Champs-Elysees, a two kilometer avenue originally laid out in the 1660â€™s by Andre Le Notre, now lined with sidewalk cafes, restaurants, airline offices theaters and chic arcades. The Arc de Triomphe, a 164 foot arch, was planned by Napoleon to celebrate his military successes. It was finally completed in 1836 after he had been dead for some fifteen years. The arch looms over Place Charles-de-Gaulle, referred to by Parisians as Lâ€™Etoile (The Star), one of Europeâ€™s most chaotic traffic circles. Franceâ€™s unknown soldier is buried here, the flame being rekindled every evening at 6:30. The arch also contains a small museum devoted to its history.

If you want to go to the top of the Eiffel Tower, be prepared to stand in line for an hour or more. The elevators to the top of this 1,000 foot structure are always crowded so we opted for a view of the city from a slightly smaller and less crowded tower. However, the view of the Eiffel Tower is magnificent at night when every girder is lit in glorious detail. It is best viewed from a boat ride on the Seine which takes about two hours and gave us a different perspective of the architecture of the city.

The Louvre, which was once a royal palace, is now the worldâ€™s largest and most famous museum. It began as a fortress around 1200 but the earliest parts still in use date from the 1540â€™s. Building was a regular process until the reign of Napoleon III in the 1860â€™s. The main attraction here is Leonardo da Vinciâ€™s Mona Lisa which was painted in 1503. Itâ€™s smaller than you might have imagined, kept behind glass, and invariable encircled by a mob of tourists. Many rooms and galleries feature well known artists from all over Europe. Many famous statues are exhibited including the celebrated Venus de Milo. New rooms for ancient Persian, Arab, and Greek art were opened in 1997. The Crown Jewels, including the 186-carat Regent diamond, and the 9th century bronze statuette of Emperor Charlemagne are also found here.

Notre-Dame Cathedral, Parisâ€™s historic and geographic heart, has been a place of worship for

more than 2,000 years. The present building is the fourth on this site, having been started in 1163, but wasnâ€™t finished until 1345. It is one of the earliest Gothic cathedrals and features circular rose windows in the transept that are particularly delicate. There is a 387-step climb up the towers for a prefect view of the gargoyles and Paris. It is also famous as the home of Quasimodo, the Hunchback, and the place of coronation of Napoleon.

Versailles is the location of one of the worldâ€™s grandest palaces and, in fact, a grand town since the chateauâ€™s opulence had to have a setting to match. Wide tree-lined avenues, broader than the Champs-Elysees and bordered by massive 17th century mansions, lead directly to the palace. In the sprawling cobbled forecourt, there is a statue of Louis XVI, the Sun King. The Chateau de Versailles took 50 years to complete. Hills were flattened, marshes drained, forests transplanted and water from the Seine river was channeled from several miles away to supply the magnificent fountains. The tour of the rooms in this building including those that made up the royal quarters is breathtaking. The Galarie des Glaces (Hall of Mirrors) is where the controversial Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919, asserting Germanyâ€™s responsibility for World War I. The chateauâ€™s vast park is a masterpiece of formal landscaping. The Grand Trianon, a scaled-down pleasure palace built in the 1680â€™s, stands nearby at one end of the Petit Canal. It is a sumptuously furnished 18th century mansion, commissioned by Louis XV. Marie-Antionette would flee here to avoid the stuffy atmosphere of the court and she built a model village nearby complete with dairy and water mill.

I was impressed with the architecture and buildings in Paris, the many bridges crossing the Seine river to connect the old and new city, and itsâ€™ sidewalk cafes that gave it a quaint atmosphere. True to its reputation, the people were quite rude in many instances.

On the morning of Friday the 21st, we drove to Luxembourg, a highland country with beautiful castles and rich in history. Luxembourg city revives the magic of Camelot, but it is the nerve center of a thousand-year-old seat of government and an important element of the European Union. A short drive outside the city of Luxembourg is the American Cemetery and Memorial that was first established in December 1944, shortly after the liberation of the area by the U.S. 5th Armored Division. This fifty acre area encompasses a cemetery with 5,076 American military dead, a memorial, a chapel, and two pylons with the names of 371 U.S. Army and Army Air Force servicemen that were Missing in Action. Included on these pylons are large maps depicting military operations in western Europe from the landings in Normandy to the end of the war. General George S. Patton, Jr. is buried here.

From here we traveled into Germany where we spent the night in Saarbrucken. The next morning it was on to Heidelberg past the rolling hills and farm lands including some of the finest vineyards in all of Germany. In Heidelberg we spent a few hours shopping and taking in the sights of the town and the Neckar river. A Jesuit church was visited, the order of Roman Catholic Society of Jesus which was founded by St. Ignatius Loyola in 1534 and devoted to missionary and educational work. We now continue eastward for several miles before turning south on the Romantic Road near Rothenburg. This is one of Germanyâ€™s most popular tourist routes, stretching for 180 miles between Wurzburg in the north to Fussen in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps. Medieval villages and 2,000 year old towns are found along this highway. We had lunch at Dinkelsbuhl before continuing on toward the Hotel Lamm in Tarrenz, Austria where we would spend Saturday night visiting with our friends, Frank and Dora Lea Nagles from Augusta, Georgia. You may remember that they were with us on the last two tours, and Jean and I spent an extra week in Germany with them after the tour of Greece was completed in 1998.

The bus ride early Sunday morning was something to remember as it maneuvered around sharp curves, through tunnels and over mountains on the way to Oberammergau, Germany for the world famous Passion Play. As we passed through Garmisch, a little snow was visible on the tallest peaks and in the mountain crevices as we continued on this unforgettable journey.

Once a decade, the spotlight shines on this tiny Bavarian hamlet, illuminating its devotion to a centuries-old tradition. By the summer of 1633, nearly 100 persons in the small town had died as the Black Plague continued its ravaging sweep through Europe. In a desperate attempt to isolate themselves, the people of Oberammergau blocked the entrances to their town. But a homesick villager slipped past the guards to rejoin his family. Unfortunately, he brought the dread infection with him. Within three days, he was dead and Oberammergau was no longer free of the plague. The villagers pleaded with God, pledging to perform a re-enactment of the passion of Jesus if God would save the town. The deaths stopped and since that day, the villagers have stepped on stage once every ten years. Today the play is presented with the same love, reverence and devotion in which the vow was made. The townâ€™s people produce and star in a theatrical production of the passion of Christ. The performance reflects century-old traditions in costumes, casting and staging. Only natives or those who have lived in the town for 20 years are eligible to audition. To add to the playâ€™s authenticity, no wigs or make-up are allowed. Cast members grow their hair and beards to match their Biblical roles. The first play was performed in 1634 in the choir loft of the church. Due to its popularity, the play was moved to the churchyard and then to a nearby field where, in 1930, the modern theatre was built. Seating 5,000, the theatre has an open stage and natural backdrop of blue sky and mountains. The all-day play is performed in German. The music and costumes are magnificent. The Oberammergau Passion Play is an unforgettable experience and draws visitors from around the globe. I wish that everyone could have the opportunity of seeing this reproduction of Jesusâ€™ life.

This part of Germany is famous for wood carvings and little shops line the streets with their wares. You may watch the carving and painting of figurines, pictures, nativity scenes and many other works of art by the people in each shop.

On Monday we continued on to Innsbruck, the capitol of Austriaâ€™s Tyrol Region. Innsbruck is famous as the sight of two winter Olympics and we walked up to the area of the ski jump which was seen around the world on TV and will long be remembered for "the agony of defeat" video clip. A large underground structure houses Crystal World, a unique collection of world famous Swarovski crystal. The city has may beautiful buildings including St. Jacobâ€™s Cathedral. The quaint Old Town area has medieval streets that lead to a building with a golden roof. This glittering sloping roof is gilded with 3500 large coin-shaped shingles. The balcony was built in the 15th century to provide members of the royal court a grand view of he tournaments and amusements that took place in the square below. Jim Higgins, his wife Pam, Jean and I had dinner at a little sidewalk cafÃ© here where we enjoyed good food and fellowship at the close of a wonderful tour. Tomorrow we would leave the group, most of who were going on to Switzerland for a week, and Jean and I would rent a car in Munich to continue on our trip. We would rejoin the group one week later in Wiesbaden at the Treff Hansa Hotel in preparation for our flight back to the States on the following day.

The Federal Republic of Germany is a democracy with a liberal market economy, a free press and religious freedom. It is a member of the European Union (EU) and the country has a population of around 82 million. Local currency is the Deutschmark with an exchange rate of about two DM to one U.S. Dollar. Europe is in the process of standardizing their currency to the Euro but that will probably be a year or so away.

The von Nida family emmigrated to America in 1748 from the little village of Kleinfischlingen and we were anxious to visit that area again. On Tuesday, July 25th, we rented a Volvo in Munich and set out for Berchtesgaden in the Bavarian (Bayer) Alps. The scenery changed from rolling hills to high mountain ranges as we traveled southeast towards Salzburg. This is beautiful countryside with Alpine villages along the way. We planned to stay in Pensions or Zimmers that provide a room for the night with breakfast the next morning. These are much akin to our Bed and Breakfast homes found throughout the U.S. and gave us a closer knowledge of the culture of each area. The fare runs from $35 - $40. per night and usually included a private bath. Most owners spoke no English so conversation was short with our hosts for the evening. In Hammer near Berchtesgaden, we found a Zimmer with a unique breakfast room containing 23 orchids in full bloom in the windows. We had dinner at the local hotel and was starting across the street to our room when we noticed several young men and women dressed in typical Bavarian outfits and carrying musical instruments. We sat down with a couple from the area and found out that several of the music teachers from nearby towns were exhibiting the talents of their students in preparation for an audition at a radio station. It was a very colorful event and we were fortunate to have heard the tradition of local music being continued by these youngsters.

On Wednesday morning we continued toward Berchtesgaden with a slight rainfall and low hanging clouds. No chance of going up to Eagles Nest at the top of the mountain, a fortress used by Hitler as a getaway during the unfortunate days of Nazi rule. There were several areas that we wanted to visit here but the weather did not cooperate so we drove on to Salzburg, Austria. This was the home of Wolfang Amadeus Mozart and the Dom (Cathedral), the first truly Italian-style church to be built north of the Alps. The original structure was built between 1614 and 1628, badly damaged during WW II, and completely restored by 1959. It is the third building to occupy this site with the huge interior accommodating 10,000 people. Time did not permit us to drive but a short distance on the German Alpine Road which runs from Lindau on Lake Constance to Berchtesgaden and has the most beautiful sights in the Bavarian Alps. We left Salzburg and drove back toward Munich, stopping in Bad Richenhall to visit a Catholic church built in 1169. As we traveled Autobahn 8 westward, we went back through Munich, then to Augsburg and Ulm before stopping for the night at a Zimmer in the village of Ichenhausen. It was a short drive the next morning to Grotzingen near Karlsruhe where we revisited the Lutheran church with the twisted spire where Baron Johann Nickolas von Nidda was buried. We had lunch in the restaurant inside the Schlob Augustenburg, a former hotel which is now a home for senior citizens. This building was the former castle Augustenburg, named for the wife of the Baron, and located just across the street from the Lutheran church. We then went through Karlsruhe and on to Landau just across the Rhine River. This was the general area where my ancestors relocated after leaving the Aachen area in the sixteenth century.

I called Kurt von Nida at his Apothecary in Edesheim who invited Jean and I to spend the night with them. We arranged to meet at 9 p.m. at the old church across the street from the home of his mother in Kleinfischlingen, a location that was familiar to me. I was soon to learn that he and Regina live one block from his mother and that they have no children.

While waiting for Kurt to get home from work, Jean and I had dinner at the only restaurant in the village (pork of course), a Zimmer where the locals gathered for beer and conversation each day. Since we were the only ones there, the owners got their English dictionaries and we opened our German dictionaries and had a limited conversation after our meal. We would return again the next day to visit with our new acquaintances.

I had missed Kurt on our visit in 1998 and it was a pleasant surprise to find that he was very involved

in the history of our family. We enjoyed an evening of hors dâ€™oeuvres, wine, and good conversation with them. He has done much to establish the names of former owners of the houses in this little village and described many in detail as we did a walking tour of the area the following Sunday. That day we also drove to the edge of the village where he said that a Roman town once stood and we walked through a plowed field and found small pieces of pottery and other articles dating back to Roman times.

This area is covered with vineyards for as far as the eye can see and some of our family continues to grow the grapes. However, like in our country, the small farmer is having a very difficult time in making a living and competing with the large operations. I reported in my last visit that the family winery was closed about 1990 after operating for over 250 years. No wine was bottled at this winery but it was prepared and sold in barrels to the families who packed it in bottles. Many German wines are of high quality with some of the grapes still being picked by hand. The lower cost wines are made from grapes that have been harvested by machinery and it is difficult to obtain people to hand pick the grapes. Some labor from the Slovenska Republic is still available as migrant workers look for employment during the harvesting season.

I received a list of all the mayors of Kleinfischlingen from Kurt and it seems that our family is related in one way or another to each of them. He also pointed out the fact that there were two Zum Weissen Lammâ€™s, one which I describe in my book and the other which was built at a later date by a descendant of Hans Georg von Nida. Look for some new pictures of these buildings on My Family website in a few weeks. We spent three days with Kurt and Regina and found them to be hard working and very friendly people. They are experimenting with some new marketing techniques for their business that I find to be quite different. They bought a piece of property with a building next to their house and have developed it into a meeting place for their customers to learn more about the products they sell. Their customers are invited to come and hear different speakers explain the effects of different medications and natural products that are used on various diseases and health related problems. The room is a botanical garden with various plants, surrounding the interior of the room, mostly in dried form, which will hold 200 people. Kurt has been recognized with articles in several trade journals and publications. He also grows many different plants in his back yard that are found throughout different parts of Europe. He picked a fig for us to eat from one of his trees that was delicious. Apples, peaches, pears and plums are also grown in the village.

While Kurt and Regina were at work on Friday the 28th, (they are at the apothecary from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily and Saturday from 8 a.m. until noon) Jean and I went to Geinsheim and found a little restaurant where we had lunch in 1998. From there we went to Speyer (Spira) located on the Rhine river where we visited Der Kaiserdom, the Cathedral of the Emperors. It was used by the Salian Emperors as a symbol of their dominion based on religion and as a family tomb. This cathedral, consecrated in the early 11th century, is the largest Romanesque edifice in Germany. The first stone was laid in 1030 under the Emperor Conrad II and was completed some thirty years later. The numerous changes made in later eras were removed during the sixties so that the Cathedral today has the same appearance given to it by the Emperors during its building. The Supreme Court of the Empire was located in Speyer from 1526 until 1689, a flourishing city with 38 churches. Because of its location on the Rhine, it developed into an important communications center where in the eighth century an imperial palace was built. It is one of the oldest Rhine cities and became a significant religious center early on and the Diet of Speyer in 1529 united the followers of Luther in a protest against the Church of Rome. Today, the city can boast of two thousand years of history, has 50,000 inhabitants, and hosts thousands of tourists each year.

From Speyer, we journeyed on to Heidelberg where we did some shopping on the traffic-free Hauptstrasse, and took pictures of the Heidelberg Castle (Schloss). This huge red-sandstone castle is a dignified ruin today but even in its deteriorated state, itâ€™s one of the finest Gothic-Renaissance castles in Germany. From its lofty perch, it looks down on the city and the Neckar river valley. Along the north side of the courtyard stretches the stern palace of Friedrich IV, erected from 1601 to 1607, and is less damaged than other parts of the castle. Its rooms have been completely restored, including the gallery of princes and kings of the German empire from the time of Charlemagne. In the cellars of the castle is the Wine Vat building, built in the late 16th century and features a huge barrel-like monstrosity, built in 1751, and capable of holding more than 55,000 gallons of wine.

We met Kurt and Regina that evening and went to dinner with their friends, Ellen Dierenfeld and her husband. Ellen is with the Wildlife Conservation Society in Bronx, NY, and travels all over the world as a scientist in wild animal nutrition. The next day we visited with Alex and Maria von Nida in Altdorf. We had stopped at their house on our way back from Heidelberg and met Alex for the first time. He had been away during our visit in 1998 and we were pleased to find him at home. However, I soon found that he spoke no English and after identifying myself, he went into the house and, to my surprise, brought out a copy of our 1998 Trip to Europe that had been posted on the Roane Co., WV GenWeb site. I managed to understand that his daughter would be home the next day and could interpret for us, so we made plans for our visit at that time. Alex and I had several things in common. He enjoys hunting and gardening and proudly showed us his gun collection and flower and vegetable gardens. His daughter, Esther, who majored in Food Chemistry at the University of Kaiserlautern, did an excellent job in overcoming the language barrier for us. His wife, Maria, invited us to have lunch with them and we readily accepted. It was an excellent meal consisting of salad, vegetables, and two meats, one being roasted wild boar which Alex had killed. This was not my usual lunch â€“ this was a full dinner with dessert! That afternoon we all drove to his sister, Dorotheaâ€™s, home and then to two of his brotherâ€™s homes, all in Altdorf. We visited the cemetery in the village and took photos of all of the von Nida family tombstones that we located there. From there we went to Edenkoben where they took us on a tour of the town and had dinner at a very nice restaurant. Before leaving that evening, Alex gave us two bottles of wine from his cellar, a hand carved wood grape leaf with grapes that was made from a wine barrel, and two jars of homemade marmalade. Their hospitality was overwhelming and we will long remember that day with Alex and his family.

On Sunday, the 30th, we said goodbye to Regina and Kurt after our tour of Kleinfischlingen with them. We had spent three evenings at their home and they were a most gracious host. Kurt and I stayed up every night into the wee hours of the morning discussing our mutual family interests â€“ there was just so much to talk about. We invited them to come to Georgia and hope that they will someday in the near future give us the opportunity of reciprocating. There were mixed emotions as we pointed the Volvo to the northwest toward Aachen, the land where our forefathers had once lived. We were sad to be leaving our new friends but we were happy for the opportunity of having shared a little of our lives with them. Kurt and Alex will each receive a copy of my book, The Family von Nida, From Germany to America 1262-1998, just as soon as we return home.

Driving on the autobahn in Germany is unlike driving anywhere that I have ever been. Outside of the metro areas, there is no speed limit so everyone can drive as fast as they want. There is a posted minimum speed limit in most areas and traffic generally moves at a very rapid pace. The first thing that I noticed was the courtesy of most drivers in Germany and the way that they always kept to the right lane on a multi-lane highway. When you pass another vehicle, it is always on the left and just as soon as you clear the passed vehicle, you move to the right lane into the traffic flow of the speed

similar to what you are driving. Many of the autobahns are three and four lanes in each direction so when traffic was light, I would on occasion drive at a speed of 105 to 110 mph, until Jean woke up. Even at that speed, many vehicles were going past me like I was sitting still. We could learn a lot from the German drivers and the courtesy of their driving habits.

Aachen, (Aix-la-Chapelle) was the capital of the Holy Roman Empire in the 9th century under the reign of Emperor Charlemagne. It lies at the frontiers of Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands. Roman legionnaires established a military bath (spa) here in the 1st century A.D. By the end of the 17th century, Aachen was known as the "Spa of Kings" because royalty from all over Europe came here to take the cure. We visited the Aachen Cathedral (Dom) that was built about 800 A.D. by the emperor Charlemagne. Within the cathedral stands the marble throne of Charlemagne, one of the most venerable monuments in Germany. From 936 to 1531 the Holy Roman emperors were crowned here until Frankfurt became the coronation city. The cathedral is an unusual mixture of Carolingian Gothic and baroque, all united into a magnificent upward sweep of architecture. The elaborate gold shrine in the chancel contains the relics of Charlemagne and the pulpit of Henry II is copper, studded with precious gems.

Our next stop was Cologne (Koln) and a visit of the Cologne Cathedral (Dom). This majestic structure is one of the worldâ€™s great cathedrals and is the spiritual and geographical heart of the city. It's the largest Gothic cathedral in Germany with construction beginning in 1248 to house the relics the three Magi brought to Cologne in 1164 by Archbishop Reinald von Dassel, Chancellor to Frederick Barbarossa. After the completion of the chancel, south tower, and north-side aisles around 1500, work was halted and not resumed until 1823. In 1880, the great enterprise was completed, and unlike many time-consuming constructions that change styles in midstream, the final result was in the Gothic style, true to the original plans. In the chancel is The Shrine of the Three Magi, the most important and valuable object in the cathedral. Itâ€™s designed in gold and silver in the form of a triple-naved basilica, and decorated with relif figures depicting the life of Christ, the Apostles, and various Old Testament prophets. Surrounding the chancel are nine chapels, each containing important works of religious art. Together with the bible windows in the sanctuary aisle and the "Konigszyklus", the splendid glass paintings in the northern aisle, dating back to the 1500â€™s, belong among the most superb examples of medieval glass work. The Renaissance glass picture windows, in tabular arrangements, are quite different from the earlier windows whose color harmony defines the light of the choir area. King Ludwig I von Bayern donated the windows in the northern-side aisle in 1842 as counterparts to the Renaissance windows. Since the 13th century the cathedral has also been a burial ground for numerous arch-bishops.

We returned to Wiesbaden and rejoined out tour group that evening and spent the following day touring the city of Frankfurt. On the evening of August 02, 2000, we all boarded a charter Lufthansa 747 and headed back to the United States, happy to be returning home, but thankful for the experiences that we had enjoyed during the past seventeen days.

Jack Nida

13 October, 2000