

My Trip to Europe, Part 4

By Andre Jordheim

We left Hemsedal valley and drove to a town called Larvik to catch the overnight ferry to Denmark, stopping to have coffee with some interesting people along the way. This woman we went to see is very well educated and well-read and well-travelled. I enjoyed talking with her. We've naturally read some of the same books and stuff.

I already described the other ferryboat. When we landed this time though, there was absolutely no customs to go through at all to get into Denmark. We went out of the way to look, being I wanted a stamp in my passport. (I got one in every other country, even Holland, though we had to go out of our way a time or two.) Denmark is in the EU and Norway isn't, so I thought there would be some customs to go through, but I guess not.

We figured Oh well. There will surely be something at the German border being it's a land demarcation. But there wasn't. Denmark is the only country I didn't get a stamp from. I didn't get anything from Denmark as a matter of fact except an example of each of their metallic currency. (Oh and an advertisement from McDonalds telling Danes that they should work there.)

Oh, one mildly interesting thing in Denmark. We had heard an awful lot of American music on the radio everywhere we went, but in this McDonald's they played American fucking RAP!!! I recognized one by Eminem that I had come across on the radio before. This "song" was uttered by someone with a voice just like Eminem's, but the words were in Danish. Most of the American music in Germany, Poland, and Scandinavia was the straight American cut. I was a little disappointed in that. I think maybe exporting American culture around the world is a little bad. Just my opinion.

We stopped for coffee at some friends' along the way in Flensburg, while moseying down to Hamburg, where we spent the last two days. These people spoke only German. It was a real shock to me to discover how rusty I had become after a week and a half of speaking English. Before we got out of Germany the first time I had been able to be with native Germans by myself and at least be able to express ourselves, however haltingly. I returned and discovered that I could hardly follow a thing at this first place getting back in Germany.

I felt like just going home. It had been a long four weeks already and I was tired of struggling with German. The plane left in two days anyway. Drat it.

But you know what? I sort of astonished even myself. I very quickly became able to understand almost everything and to be able to spout off spontaneous thoughts without having to painstakingly build my sentences before uttering them. It was a lot of fun. It really was. There's so little time to study anything when you're a truck driver that all I had managed to do was to arrive with a 1300 word vocabulary and just sort of wing it. I'm sure I sounded like an Indian in a spaghetti western - "me climb tree" - but I didn't care. Some people are afraid to dive in like I did, 'cause they don't want to sound stupid with that "me climb tree" stuff, but all

I cared about was being to able to exchange thoughts. The grammar sort of falls into place with practice. In English too, I can't really point out for you a dangling participle or a split infinitive, but I know they're wrong when I see one. (I actually aced that part of the SAT. They call that part the TSWE.) I don't know. I guess what I mean to say is it either sounds right or it doesn't. Grammar and syntax are just that way with me. Just sort of intuitive.

Anyway, there I go again getting off the subject (I'm glad I digressed and included that part though, because the experience of speaking German was actually one of the great highlights of the trip for me. Sounds strange, but it was.)

During the last two days we went to a nature park, for one thing. They have them all over Germany and people like to stroll around in them. They're sort of like a zoo, but they cover many, many acres. There are no buildings or cages. All of the animals are housed in natural surroundings. Sometimes you don't even get to see some of them because they're off hiding. I was amused to see the baby Wilde Schwein. They looked like furry little piglets, but acted for all the world like puppies scrambling over each other, always on the run and tumble. It was really cute.

The next day we went to the harbor (Hamburg is the third largest port in the world) and took a boat tour. Then we strolled around and had bratwurst at a sidewalk stand. You know what? Before I left I had thought that being the plane landed in Frankfurt I better have a hot dog there, and being it left from Hamburg I should have a hamburger there, but it didn't work out that way. Maybe the bratwurst in Hamburg completes half of it in a sort of mix-and-match way.

We left there and drove down a street called the Reeperbahn. It's world famous as.... well.... it's a place to sap a little of the sailors' pent up energy (if you know what I mean), and a lot of their money. It must have been ten blocks of things like I've only seen maybe a block or two in the States. It must be something to see after dark, I'll bet.

Then we drove to a place closer to the mouth of the river where they have a reviewing stand on a pier and every ship over 500 gross tons is greeted as they enter and as they leave the harbor, both in their language and in German, and their national anthem is played as well as "Deutschland Über Alles". Wouldn't you know it? The first ship to come by was a Norwegian one. Dad stood up and grinned and put his hand over his heart. I said in German that being I was half, I would squat instead. Everyone laughed.

We ordered a meal at the outdoor cafe there and watched several ships come and go. We saw a sailing ship come through that was so huge that it actually qualified for the limit. It turned out to have been a Russian-flagged ship that had been built in Gdansk, Mom's home town, in '87. They played the Russian national anthem, but it was still kind of a thrill, especially for Mom having grown up a stone's throw from the shipyard. Well, for me too, being we had just been there a few days ago.

Well, the plane ride back was nothing unusual. Only that all our stuff got X-rayed and gone through at every single stop. Hamburg, Amsterdam, Minneapolis,

and Fargo. They even made us take our shoes off in Amsterdam, thanks to Richard Ried, that British guy. Remember him? Doesn't he look like there might be a camel in his recent ancestry? I sure thought so. Maybe it's just me. (Oh, they didn't check our stuff in Fargo. I guess it's all right to blow up Hector International.)

One thing strange though. I had a 100-year-old antique cigarette lighter that I got at a street market in Poland for 20 zlotys (about 5 bucks). I don't even know what kind of gas it runs on or if I can get flints that'll fit it. Anyway, the inspector who discovered it in my checked bag in Hamburg took off the top part that contains all the "workings" and said, "hey, this part could be dangerous. Better keep that on you, in your pocket. We'll stow this benign part below." Then he handed me the "dangerous" part, and put the bottom part back in my checked luggage. Go figure.