

A rolling stone gathers no moss, but it gets a great shine

The trip had the appeal of a journey in that we proceeded in a generally eastward direction from Western Ireland to Northern Germany, through Britain and France. Our actual destination, however, is more a new way of looking at things. If we can explore a good bit of the wonder of God's earth, then we will never suffer from boredom. What is a grand tour, but a chance to gain wisdom and gather experience? I revelled in the planning of the trip's details on the polished wood surface of my familiar desk.

We departed the States on July 3 and arrived in Ireland on the Fourth. I pride myself on my patriotism and felt I'd miss the Independence holiday and the baseball All-Star game the following week. A wistful feeling came over me as the plane from Atlanta went north over the eastern seaboard and we watched fireworks from above, high over the New York islands and New England.

But a "coming home" feeling stayed with me all throughout western Ireland and Co. Roscommon. We found the wild rivers, bogs and the endless green of the Emerald Isle bewitching.

Not green but also bewitching is the Burren, Ireland's Rock Garden. The Burren's name is derived from the Gaelic word for a rocky place. The bare limestone terrain was scraped clear of soil and vegetation by glaciation. Perhaps this part of Ireland between Doolin and Galway has kept a Gaelic character because of its lack of attraction for the English. Bloodthirsty English colonists in the 1600s reported "neither water enough to drown a man, nor a tree to hang him, nor soil enough to bury him." Small wonder the natives were glad those folks left.

There isn't much water to drink in the Burren but the view from the towering Ballinalacken Castle over the swells of the grey Atlantic or from the Cliffs of Moher make them destinations in themselves. We did find an ancient holy well in Co. Clare. Before Christian times, dating from 200 b.c., Druids tended the holy wells as well as guiding the tribe and serving as caretakers of the land. I found myself caught up in daydreams of a Druid ancestor, whirling away in the magic of seers and bards, sages, negotiators and travelers, shape-shifters and spell casters. That old ancestor did his job, too, because I see the tribe sustained in the smiling eyes of the Irish and Irish-Americans. The deep knowledge of the Druids lives on, as rooted as an oak and as free as a wren.

But the "coming home" feeling seemed a waste of sentiment at times. In many small towns, the grey, grim life of the Irish seems depressed or lacking in cheerfulness. The only roads lead to other, identical towns, dominated by bars and funerals. In Enistymon we saw the curious sign BAR/Undertaker. The Irish seem to place a special emphasis on wakes and funerals, as Nature does on the change in seasons.

The dour look is balanced by the famous cheerful friendliness in some folks, usually women. The role of the Church is the singular force in their lives. But patriotism is generally expressed

by drinking too much Guinness and watching endless matches of Gaelic sports in the pubs. There are some bad drinkers in Ireland along with the friendly revellers. We saw a man awake at the Merchants' in Dublin and get a Guinness, drink it and set his head back down on the bar for some more snoozing.

Hopi watched him, aghast.

The spoonsplayer in the traditional band winked at her. She liked that.

Get down on your knees and thank God you're on your feet

The young Irish say "No problem" a lot. A sulky bunch, they are, but not as bad as the English. All over Europe, it seems the youth are less helpful and friendly than older folk.

Theresa Flynn is a 65-ish bartender at Fallon's Pub in Dysart. Dysart is an ancient Gaelic name. The town was known as Thomastreet for about 30 years, until "recently." Theresa worked for the Fallons for 31 years before the pub was recently leased on a three year trial to the Kellys. The unsavory clientele also winked at Hopi, which she did not like. Theresa met us outside as we left and directed us to Fallon Castle. The ruins of Fallon Castle lie at the end of a long, winding dirt road through sheep pasture and two or three unlocked gates, she said. Before departing she fortified me with free Guinness.

We bounced the little rental as far as we could and parked and decided to walk through the next gate. We walked down a path and through another gate and there was a creek and up the hill on the other side was the castle, or should I say, what was left of it. It looked mostly like a pile of rocks, isolated by miles and miles of green pasture lands. It was so pretty, though, I had to go back to the car to get the camera. When I returned, Hopi was perched on a ruined stone window sill.

"You need to pay the toll to cross."

I answered "I am a Fallon."

"Oh, then this must be your castle. I was protecting it until the master returned. Are you the master of this castle?" she asked.

"I am now" I answered.

"Then you may enter."

We explored further, finding a wide path that looked like it could have been the main entrance to the castle. We also found a circular pattern of stonework, perhaps the lookout tower. Although the castle is mostly grown over with grass and ferns, the formation of it could be picked out and that was exciting.

After the ruins, Theresa was delighted to see us return to the pub to report. I felt obliged to thank her and to make sure she'd weathered the ruffians who were there when we had left. She showed us a postcard someone had sent from Fallon, Nevada, the "Oasis of Nevada."

Irish "pioneers" view England and America as places where change is possible and energy and

creativity can be released. Impressed as Theresa seemed to be with our adventurous journey, I asked her to come and visit us in the States, but she said she is afraid to fly. I said consider a boat. But it turns out she's afraid of water, too.

Don't worry. You are either sick or well. If you are sick you will either live or die, and if you die you will be so busy shaking hands with friends in heaven or hell that you won't have time to worry.

We met a modern day Fallon. A young handsome fellow with blue eyes, he and his mates, including a bronchitic old salt, were working in the Ancient Tisrara cemetery. In our search for my great-great grandfather, they directed us to Dysart. O'Fallon is a true Irish name from the time of the Celts, the island's oldest inhabitants. "Fitz" indicates Norman descent and is the second oldest line. Mac... & Sweeney were originally Scots. My grandmother was a Sweeney. The Sweeneys came to Ireland in the 14th Century as warriors.

We saw a lot of old men wearing tie and tweed cap and jacket while driving tractors and doing farm work along the tiny, twisting country roads. On our way to supper late in the afternoon one day, we came upon such a man on a bicycle, herding cows to a milking. He and the cows took up the whole road, we felt obliged to "give way" as they appeared to have belonged here for all time. We had some white-knuckle encounters with on-coming farmers' tractors on the rollercoaster roads, but never experienced a traffic jam. Most of the countryside was wonderfully empty of people, even in July.

Revelling in my half-Irishhood, I came to think of myself as an act of a long-running show of Fallons and Geltings, most of whom have already been on and off stage. This bloke and "me missus" danced around with the ghosts of my ancestors in the little haunts of Ireland.

On the last day in Dublin, we saw a lady dwarf-midget crossing the street before us in a great hurry. I rue the abuse she must take here in this country which fears the "little fairy people."

Prejudice is real here. We met a lovely family from Ulster on the crossing from Dublin-Dun Laoghaire to Holyhead. Catholic, they related stories of the Troubles in the North but insisted their kids played well with Protestants and went on about how fine things were up there. The oldest son, about ten, was quite knowledgeable in Irish history. Sinn Fein supports independence, but violently. The Loyalists are violent, too. The recent release of an English soldier who "murdered" an "innocent" joyrider created a stir. A joyrider steals a car and rides, then leaves it, usually not damaging the car. Usually, the police just shoot for the tires, the mother insisted.

Anyway, the woman, otherwise nice and reasonable, also insisted blacks are all "rude and ignorant." Her meetings were apparently limited to London trains. Mark Twain said travel is fatal to prejudice. This kind lady just needs more experience, I figured, to reshape her ideas a bit.

On Saturday night at the Dublin International Hostel, some thugs painted BLACKS OUT OF IRL on the wall. The hostel folks had painted over the graffiti by noon on Sunday while we were at Mass in nearby St. Joseph's Church.

May the road rise to meet you. May the wind always be at your back. May the sunshine warm your face, the rain fall soft upon your fields; And until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of his hand.

Well, there's so much more to say about Ireland. I'm sure Hope would include in any description of our days in Ireland an account of the Connemara ponies, the horses we rode in Roscommon (Tom Joe and Henry) and the racehorse who won for her at the track in Dublin. It was her only bet all evening and the horse won the race! Cheers!

*The water is wide,
I cannot get o'er,
Neither have I wings to fly.
Give me a boat that can carry two,
And both shall cross,
My true love and I.*

We crossed the Irish Sea on Monday morning, crossing from Dun Laoghaire, near Dublin to Holyhead in Wales. One of the water pumps on the ferry gave out so the journey lasted a good bit longer than expected. This called to mind the old joke poking fun at a couple of Irish lads, Pat and Mike. On an airliner trip, Pat and Mike were informed by the captain that one of the jet's engines had given out but not to worry, there were three others and the loss of one engine would merely slow them down. Later the captain reported the loss of another engine with the same admonishment not to worry, it was true though they would be significantly slowed down. When the captain announced the failure of the third engine, Pat leaned over to Mike and proclaimed "If we should lose that last engine, it will take forever to get there."

In the afternoon, we skirted the Caledonia Mountains in northern Wales, a beautiful ride on the train. We changed trains in Chester and started the last leg of the pilgrimage to Liverpool.

Lots of wood with peeling yellow paint and little school bus-like seats make the campy little train from Chester to Liverpool seem like a toy. The warm, hazy sunlight augmented a dreamy mood. I looked around, trying to decide which passengers might be fellow pilgrims. Only one couple appeared they might be, so I stowed my reticence, and asked. They both scowled, they were into "alternative" and being British, the Beatles were especially old hat, they snipped. No matter, this was our trip. Maybe you have been to the British Isles. You stayed in the same awful hostels, awake all night. But they weren't so bad, you're thinking, sort of charming, an international experience. Forget all that. This is about our trip.

We emerged from the train station into bustling Liverpool through grimy tiled tunnels, where street guitarists busk for small change. After the noisy nights in the Dublin hostel and the journey across the Irish Sea and Wales, the St. Georges Hotel was a well-deserved rest. A cute Liverpudlian girl in the lobby checked us in and made us feel right at home. I took a bath while Hopi checked out BBC television. In the fine old hotel bar, I caught up on my notes and listened to old men debate the finer points of crafting brews and wine.

*My bonnie lies over the ocean
My bonnie lies over the sea
O' bring my bonnie back to me*

The next morning, after a meaty buffet breakfast, we stashed our backpacks in a cloakroom and

went "beatling." Albert Dock boasts the world class museum The Beatles Story, but the Magical Mystery Tour Bus is the way to get the flavor of old Liverpool. Eerie Strawberry Field is a Salvation Army children's home. John used to climb the brick and wrought iron fence there to get in and play with the kids, the start, perhaps, of his endearing brand of waywardness. Penny Lane is true to the song in every detail and vice-versa. These places make you realize that life does, indeed, imitate art.

The Beatles unwittingly made it impossible for themselves to live in Liverpool. But you could live well here, strolling its massive parks. In all of England's big cities, we were struck by the beautiful, big well-groomed parks. Hyde Park in London is the king, but the green expanses with dark wrought iron fences near Strawberry Field in Liverpool inhabit my thoughts still and, I think, always will.

and in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make

On the train to York we were diverted, and the English became quite rude and upset, as they did on the Stena Sea Lynx crossing of the Irish Sea, when it was delayed by the loss of a water pump. It was grand laughing at the Mancunians' and Liverpudlians' rage, though I knew I was just as bad in more familiar trappings. But now, I could take in the landscape like a narcotic, dosed out to maintain a nice even buzz. Briefly I wondered why the natives couldn't revel in the scenery and add to their mental inventory of it with each passing, glad for every delay. But, then, why could not I do so at home? The poet Robert Graves wrote:

*And when we passengers are given two hours,
When once more the wheels fail at Somewhere-Nowhere,
To climb out, stretch one's legs and pick wild flowers –
Suppose that this time I elect to stay there?*

It seems everyone has been to Britain. But I was not prepared by my reading and conversations for the sense of discovery. It made the going good. My Europe was different than what I had heard and read about.

York and Yorkshire are marvelous with two national parks: Yorkshire Dales National Park and the North Moors NP along the North Sea coast. Historical figures from Robin Hood to James Herriot abound in the delightful dales and moors of Yorkshire. We washed the sins off our hands in the freezing North Sea at Whitby, from whence Captain Cook set sail. We watched as curiously the cricket players on the beach as they did us.

In York we stayed in a neat old hostel on a cobblestone street in the ancient part of town. York is a lovely city with most of the original Roman city wall intact. You can walk along the top of it and see the bars (gates) where they used to admit people into the city. The heads of enemies would be displayed to warn off invaders. York Minster, hundreds of years in the making, still dominates the town. Going in there for a quick look was kind of like trying to eat just one Lays potato chip, but we were booked on a train to London, so we had to run.

Got to go get on my groovy train

BritRail is a jolly mess now, what with the drivers striking. Our luck continued to hold, though,

as did the weather. We pulled into King's Cross station just as a light rain cleared and queued up for a ride in a big shiny black London taxi. On the way to the City of London hostel, just around the corner from St. Paul's Cathedral, we learned the rail strike would be a series of scheduled one-day shutdowns. The first would be tomorrow and our itinerary called for a bus (thank goodness) tour to Stonehenge and Bath.

We spent our afternoon and evening knocking around the city, crisscrossing the Thames River on the London and Tower Bridges. We sat in a pub and contemplated how the Thames was once a tributary of the Rhine when England was part of the continent. That was before a lot of continental drifting, in about the time it takes for an American tourist to get served in an English pub at happy hour.

As evening fell, shadows and gaslight danced on the old crooked alleyways and people hurried away into the night.

In the morning, after a fitful night's sleep stacked in bunks at the hostel, we caught a ride on the "Tube" to the bus station. London's underground subway system isn't the most modern or the cleanest, but it goes everywhere. The connections are so good that we were able to see much more of London than we had dared hope. The list of spots reads like a tourist's guide book to Baroque London: Tower of London, Dicken's Inn Pub, Westminster Abbey, Houses of Parliament, Big Ben, Hyde and Green Parks, Abbey Road, Buckingham Palace, Baker Street and Piccadilly Circus.

Three times a day, I checked my pockets to be sure I still had all the tickets, money and passports. Pickpockets twist and swarm through these places.

Every time I saw a herd of tourists crowding on and off tour buses, I was glad that we had planned this journey ourselves. I never understood organized tours. It seems you see lots of places you don't really want to see, along with what you hoped to see. Certainly, the sense of discovery that made the going good, would be lost.

Despite all that, we did go on a bus trip to Stonehenge and Bath. A dual purpose was served: first, to avoid renting a car and second, to set aside all the cares of planning and executing travel, for a day. Just get on the bus.

Roll up, roll up for the mystery tour

We had the epitome of a rude American in the far back of the bus and the epitome of the well-bred and educated stuffy Englishman as a tour guide in the front. A few barbs were hurled by both, but the peace held. It was a good thing it was just a day trip and in the end, the offending tourist fell asleep.

The magic of Bath, England is borne of a melange of ancient faith in gods and goddesses and reverence for nature. Man's 15th century Bath Abbey and the Neoclassic architecture from Bath's 18th century revival make it an inspiring place. Sulis, goddess of water and other Celtic mother goddesses still nurture the springs by keeping a silent vigil set in stone.

Roman soldiers of 2,000 years ago generally hated duty in the North because of the cool climate. But Bath's 46 degree celsius spring water made the place a prize assignment. The great stone carving, Gorgon's Head, looms over the main bath and incorporates the Roman gods of sun and sea, Sol and Neptune. The Greek titan Oceanus seems to stir the melange with a haunting resemblance to Gorgon.

The water at Bath has no magical quality, although it is naturally hot. The people believed it had curing power because many of them never bathed from birth to death and a wash felt so good, they believed they were cured by the water. 240,000 gallons of it still flow through the ancients' baths everyday.

By the time we got to Stonehenge we had found that perspective we were looking for in the first paragraph. The windswept Salisbury Plain there sprawls away like my mind does as I imagine back in time before there were roads.

The rocks of Stonehenge are from Wales, far to the east. Scholars believe Bronze Age chieftains directed the hauling of the stones on rafts and rolled them on logs. The origin of the rock is as certain as these things get. Great Britain is probably the most well-defined geologic turf in the world and is where the science got its start. The region's diversity and outcrop exposure gave rise to curiosity and afforded easy viewing of the rocks. Diversity is due to two great mountain-building episodes, or orogens, of the Paleozoic era (280 - 560 million years before present). The orogens resulted in tilt and therefore, exposure. Later in time, ice sheets covered the area as far south as London. The fall of the British empire takes on a diminished importance when one considers that well before man, Britain was a rain forest, then was covered by arid dunes and during the time of dinosaurs, the Isles lay along the equator and were surrounded by reefs.

Small hills called chalk downs were favored by prehistoric man, including those at Stonehenge. The downs and the Dover Cliffs are a limestone formed from microfossil debris. More simply put, these majestic features of nature are old, old dead critters. The phenomenally short amount of geologic time it takes Man to impact the earth is illustrated by the fact that for eons, these chalk deposits used to bear artesian water from under London. The H₂O is now exhausted.

We caught an early train to Dover in the morning. Many anxious business folk were trying to make up time they had lost to the one-day strike so it was crowded and things were running late. I wondered when we would ever get to Paris but when we got on the ferry to Calais, I relaxed. England is certainly underrated as a destination, but I was glad to be past the English. We were headed south and the sun beat down on the Cliffs of Dover. It is as bright a sight as one can see in nature. The dazzling white cliffs can be seen astern for hours after departure.

What can be written about Paris in a travel story? How a million others have already described it? The list of places we reached via Le Metro? That I was reading The Hunchback (did I tell you I did Sherlock in London?) So I set myself down to tell of the coming and going to Paris.

I knew I could order a meal and ask directions in French, so I wasn't intimidated. The Tourist Bureau had a new campaign called "Bonjour" designed to welcome tourists and encourage the

industry employees to smile. Which was worse, I wondered, antagonistic francophones or friendly?

A light rain fell on us and our backpacks as we beat around the Latin Quarter trying to find the Hôtel Esmerelda. It was worth the search. The hotel was built in 1640 directly across the Seine River from Notre Dame. We curled around the creaking wooden staircase to our room and settled in. Pulling open the gauzy curtains and throwing wide the tall old windows, we witnessed a spectacular double rainbow over the cathedral towers.

Oh là là! Magnifique!

Notre Dame is the finest example of Gothic architecture. In the 1100s, builders learned to reach new heights with graceful buildings built around stone frameworks. Slender pillars support light ribbed vaults. Exterior beams called flying buttresses were placed to support the height.

I found it difficult to reconcile the modern French with their distinguished history. Why would such an ethnically "pure" group, borne of grace and known for their exquisite taste, give rise to the crass impetuous French youth of today? Or the politicians bent on nuclear superiority. There are more nose rings in Paris than anywhere in the world. And don't try to wait in line with the French lest you be pushed and bullied. They also seem to have some weird fascination for dead American rock stars. There are pictures, posters and T-shirts all over town depicting Morrison (died and buried here), Marley, Joplin, Hendrix and Cobain.

I was pleased with how much I was able to converse in French. I even made a Frenchman laugh in his own language at the Louvre. I asked "Ou sont les Impressionists?" He replied "la Musée d'Homme." I said, "Alors, c'est le premier musée de Paris." This comment elicited a good natured chuckle.

Empty your full glass. Fill your empty glass. I cannot bear to look at you with your glass either empty or full.

With François Rabelais providing the above inspiration and Bacchus supplying the wine, we enjoyed the Vouvrays, Chinons and Sancerres of the Loire Valley. To get there, take the train from Gare d'Austerlitz in Paris and get off in the charm-filled town of Blois. A small town of about 49,000 cultured souls, Blois bursts with fine drink and food, shops, cobblestone alleys opening on to vistas of the river valley and its own castle, the Château Blois. Historical figures and/or ghosts associated with Blois include François I (1494-1547), the master builder, the poet Charles d'Orléans, Louis XII, the matronly patron Catherine de'Medici and Henri III. Much blood was spilled over the years in the castle. In 1588, Henri, the Duc de Guise plotted to kill his host, King Henri III but was done in by the king's men and his head served to the king on a platter.

It's a short ride on the train to Amboise, where Leonardo da Vinci lived, died and was buried. The château is easily explored in a short while, leaving time to take in the views from the castle walls of the old town and the valley. It was here that da Vinci gave the Mona Lisa to the king. Charles VIII died at Amboise when he hit his head on a doorway. Pity the builder, who may have claimed that Charles was just naturally clumsy as he had six toes on each foot.

To get to Chenonceau, the most magnificent of the Loire Valley châteaux, take the bus from Amboise and walk up the avenue of trees. The castle starts between two enormous symmetrical gardens and stretches across the river in a three story gallery. Always the object of great envy, Chenonceau was seized in 1519 by Catherine de'Medici. She had just been widowed when Henri II was killed in a tournament at which time she decided to take Chenonceau from her deceased husband's mistress, Diane de Poitiers, the beauty. Diane got Chaumont in exchange. Many other women have known the intrigue and appeal of Chenonceau, notably Madame Dupin, the intellect, Madame Pelouze, antiquarian and the inconsolable Louise de Lorraine who lived out her life in black after her husband's early death.

Le croisement est la joie de vivre

We had to go back to Paris for the best rail connections to Germany. Although it was the only backtracking we would do, I didn't mind. Paris is a place worth returning to many times. By now you've probably gathered I don't say that about many places. The ride also gave me more time to consider the landscape of France. The country is a microcosm of Europe's geology, with the three major types of landforms. They are 1) the sedimentary basins, or lowlands including the Paris Basin, 2) the worn-down older mountain blocks and 3) the younger, steep folded mountains of the southeast.

The amorous overnight train ride in a sleeper car from Gare de l'Est in Paris to Frankfurt/Main was a thrill. That's really rockin' and rollin'! When I awoke the next morning, the sun was just coming up over the hills east of the Rhine River Valley. I had the same "coming home" feeling as when we got to Ireland.

The Frankfurt/Main to Köln train ride is most scenic between Mainz and Koblenz on the Rhine. My Dad says the river cruise is quite a "splendid treat" and so does National Geographic. Even early cruiser Mark Twain was an admirer of the Rhine. Castles from the Middle Ages to 1800s, terraced farmland, coal barges and the river sparkling in the early morning light came together to make a lovely scene.

The cathedral at Köln is enormous, Gothic and a bit dark. Recent explorations indicate the cathedral was begun with ruins of a Roman temple. If in Köln it shouldn't be missed, otherwise not. It's right near the train station, so a one hour stop there was perfect for us. We had enough time to see the place, but not enough to feel obliged to walk up the towers' 500+ steps (no lift).

When we finally got off the train in Münster after spending most of the previous 24 hours on four different trains, we sat down to lunch at a little cafe in the Centre near the train station. A feeling of rocking motion stayed with both of us for hours.

German precision: "Later is too late."

By now, Hopi and I definitely found that fresh perspective we were seeking. What we found is that fresh perspectives, like many educational experiences, are exhausting. I kept thinking of the familiars I missed the most: my dog, my skates, my desk, my car and rice. Europeans' starch of choice is the potato. Rice is found mainly in dimly lit Chinese greasy spoons.

We spent a couple of days with my second cousin, one generation removed (Gabriel) and her family. Her mother, Mia was especially warm and friendly with many greetings for my Dad. She and husband Heinz really liked Dad's 1951 pictures which I had brought with me. They looked so young then. We took new pictures of course, you'd be amused no doubt. Dominic (10) and Nikolay (15) have beatish haircuts like I did at that age. Their names as well as Natasha's (17) are all from War and Peace, I gathered from Gabriel's broken english. It seems strange since grandpa Heinz was wounded in Russia/Crimea. I did not ask as discussion of the war seems off-limits, although Mia did have pictures of Heinz in Nazi uniform. I gathered he was a fairly high-ranking officer. When you speak as much German as Hope or I or as much English as the Kutschs and Neumanns it is a little difficult to be really sure of anything. Heinz told Hope "I love you." Her guess is that he was once quite a ladies' man. Herr Horst Neumann, Gabriel's husband, speaks the best English and was very accommodating and fun to be with. We visited Münster one day and while on a long walk, he explained the German ethos quite poignantly. He is from eastern Germany near Poland.

They all live in a converted farmhouse with a very unpleasant and, I think, dangerous German Shepard dog. The masonry on the fireplace dates to the 1500s. Apparently zoning law prohibits or limits new construction in this part of Münsterland, so lots of fine homes are converted from farm buildings. The kids live where the pigs used to be and the living room was once a horse stable.

We stayed at a guesthouse in nearby Glandorf which worked out well for everyone. Gabriel stays home, never drives. Horst commutes 30-40 minutes to Münster for his job as a public prosecutor. He drives everyday right past Telgte on the River Ems where my great grandmother set off for America. Since gas (benzin) costs about \$4.40 a gallon, I hope he is making good money. The train station in Warendorf, near Milte where they live, just burned down and they all think this funny because nobody likes the train service anymore in that area. That's just one of the ways in which Americanization has taken root. To me, though, with the exception of London, Europe retains an altogether old world flavor.

Münster is neat but certainly not spectacular. Two cathedrals there result from a dispute between a bishop and the merchants. The merchants built their own, slightly taller cathedral practically right next door. The market we saw there in front of the Bishop's on a Saturday morning was a cornucopia of fruits and flowers. People, even old people, speed around Münster on bicycles, I have never seen a town so full of bikes. We also visited the exquisitely carved interior of the Rathaus where a big treaty was signed back in the 17th century.

Actually before we ever got to this, we had already seen Greven, Borken and Rheine while we had a rental car for 24 hours out of Münster. I enjoyed these towns more than Münster. Rural mostly, Greven has a lovely small town atmosphere and the St. Martinus Church where my great Uncle Felix nicked the Laumann family name plate off one of the pews. We stayed at a gasthof in Greven (fun bar, good food, but this one was a dear 110DM) and investigated nearby Laumann's Damm and farm. The old coot at the farm was delighted we had come from America but his english was basically non-existent, so we did not stay long. Apparently, the old Sandmann family farm is now under the autobahn. More about that later.

Borken is a town near the border with the Netherlands and was bombed to smithereens, now it is rebuilt and you would never know it. St. Remigius, where Nickolaus Gelting was likely baptized as well as Wilhelm, stands proudly in the center of the cute little town, a bit of the old city wall still stands. Nickolaus was my great-great grandfather and reportedly was born and died in Borken. Wilhelm is my great grandfather who emigrated to America.

We left Münster by train for Hamburg, a real seedy rock-n-roll kind of town, not recommended. Hamburg is in contrast to most German towns we visited which were mainly rural and unfailingly charming. Hamburg is anything but charming. You've probably heard of the Reeperbahn where the Beatles got their touring start. It's basically a redlight district and the rest of the town isn't a whole lot better but definitely entertaining in a raucous sort of way. These two towns are really different. Lots of soldiers have always lived in Münster, both German and English. Tradition also appears more respected and intact in Münsterland.

We drove an Audi up the autobahn at about 180 km/hour to the cutoff for Kappeln and then on to the little resort town of Gelting.

I won't say Gelting should "not be missed", as it is certainly a long way from anything and the beaches are nothing to write home about. Actually, they're in the nearby towns of Nieby and Wackerballig. Baltic sea (Ostsee) beaches are stony, not sandy. But, still, Gelting was the highlight of Europe for me. I just got such a kick out of the place. It was especially nice that we planned to go there regardless of the nature of the town, just for the name and it turns out to be this sleepy little undiscovered resort town. They even have a pizza place. The rouladen was good at a little place we went to near the marina up the bay a bit. It's the quiet roads and trails that charm. If I ever go back, I'd rent bicycles. We did a lot of walking in the nature preserve. Bicycles are allowed in there, so every once in a while, some would zip by us. You can see Denmark from the peninsula that is Geltinger Birk. We had the pleasure of being there on a crystal clear day, our last full one in Germany. Paul Theroux wrote:

Künstlerschuld means "artist's guilt," the emotion a painter feels over his frivolity...perhaps there is also a sort of traveler's guilt..

I cannot help but mention the comic but embarrassing detail of how we somehow got locked in our room in the Gasthof Gelting and had to yell for help in broken German.

Gelting is likely derived from a Danish word. The peninsula used to be marshlands, a dam was built and the windmill Charlotte was used to pump water out to the bay. Farmland was thus reclaimed. A 1652 map clearly shows the previous landform of the peninsula. The mayor related one theory that the name of the town derives from a Danish word for a boar's head, as the old map does show the peninsula to appear to look like. The mayor emphasized that this meaning is just one theory. A good bit of delicious mystery remains.

I kept a bottle of Gelting champagne made from grapes of the nature preserve that I am saving for Christmas.