

Travel Can Be the Pits!

One June some years ago, Susan and I were squiring our two Advanced Young Riders around Europe. We luncheoned with our friend and teacher, Colonel Sommer, at the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen. We took the ferry past Hamlet's castle from Helsingør to Sweden. Major and Mrs. Lindgren toured us around Flyinge, the cathedral at Lund and the Viking "stonehenge" at Ystad, then put us on the overnight train down to Aachen for the weeklong CHIO.

Much of the equestrian world gathers there each year for what is arguably the biggest dressage, show jumping, and carriage driving competition anywhere. Predictably, the hotels are jammed, and respecting our frugal upbringing, we were staying well off-site on the other side of town. Urban German infrastructure being somewhat more substantial than Marion County, Florida's, it was easy enough to catch the autobus outside our hotel, ride downtown to the *bushof*, and transfer to the CHIO bus. No big deal, and as the days went by we were getting fairly good at it. One of our teenaged charges was also coming face to face with societal norms which her slouchy American high school manners hadn't prepared her for. Case in point, when she put a foot up on the seat across from her, the bus driver actually stopped the bus, and would not proceed until she put it back on the floor where it belonged. We, having limited control over her (though perhaps more than her own parents did), secretly applauded, while simultaneously observing that had a driver in most U.S. cities tried the same tactic, he would likely have been met, at the least, with disdain or belligerence if not by a violent confrontation with some knife-wielding gangbanger.



So one late afternoon as the show's session ended, we took the CHIO bus back downtown, and while we were waiting for our transfer, I popped in to a sidewalk grocery and bought a small tray of just-picked, juicy black cherries to snack on before dinner. Shortly thereafter, our Route 52 autobus pulled to the curb, and we all scrambled aboard. Now, had this been in the States, I might just have spit the (bio-degradable) cherry pits out the window, but it was a pretty sure bet that such behavior would not float the driver's boat, so taking no chances, as I ate my cherries, I sequestered all the pits, chipmunk-like, in one cheek to be disposed of later.

The ride seemed longer than normal. Oddly, at one point, the bus stopped in the middle of the *strasse* and was boarded by a pair of policemen who demanded to see everyone's passports. "Some anti-terrorist thing," I said to myself, but as the trip dragged on, I became more uneasy. For one thing, none of the scenery looked familiar. For another, the street signs didn't appear to be in German anymore! Light was dawning that not only were we NOT where we were supposed to be, but we didn't know which wrong country we had managed to blunder into. "Might be Belgium," we speculated. "Might be Holland." "Any idea where Luxembourg is?" inquired Susan.

The bus wound itself through a residential neighborhood until we were the only passengers left. It glided to its terminus in a lonely cul-de-sac, and the driver motioned for us to disembark. With my anxiety level rising, I tried without success to explain our predicament. He was generally baffled by my English, my emphatic gestures, and even more so by my trainwreck of mis-recalled high school French. Seizing the day, Susan

pushed me back to my seat and rescued us with some combination of reasoning, guttural sounds, and flirtation.

Only when we were headed back towards the *bushof* , realizing we had the right route but had taken it in the wrong direction, did I notice that my cheekful of cherry pits had disappeared. Yes, in my Will-We-Ever-Get-Home-Again tizzy, I'd swallowed all sixteen!

To continue the story beyond this point would exceed the T.M.I. threshold. Suffice it to say that I can testify to the restorative properties of German *dunkel* beer in situations of extremis, this one included.

