

Report on Sabbatical Leave
for
the Academic Year, 1965-1966

Submitted by,

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Sabbatical Leave 1965-1966

Early in August, 1965, I left Covina and drove across the United States to Vermont where I visited other spots of historical interest and the Middlebury Language School, one of the finest.

The students there speak only the language they are studying. Any willfull use of English, even during leisure hours, is reason for dismissal. The instructors are all native speakers; however, this is not necessarily a summum bonum since native speakers are often unaware of the reasons for difficulties confronting foreigners who are trying to learn their languages. Another unavoidable problem is the American accent with which the students necessarily speak to each other; nevertheless, the facility in speaking gained by the students is truly impressive.

Next I drove to New York City where my car was loaded aboard the United States. "We" disembarked in Bremerhaven.

After the formalities and complications of getting the car unloaded and insured with a German insurance company (whose rates are scandalously high and which will pay nothing for damage to the insured person's car,) I drove across Germany and most of Austria to Vienna.

The first week in Vienna was extremely busy because of making up the first few days' work of the course for foreigners at the university, wondering what had happened to some money that was supposed to be waiting for me when I arrived, and finding a place to live.

The annoyances with money turned out to be an opportunity to see how the Viennese treat penniless and worried foreigners.

I have never encountered so many acts of simple, human

kindness in so short a span of time! A waitress offered to let me charge meals at the restaurant until my money came, my landlady let me move in without paying any deposit or rent, saying it was un-Viennese to rush, and un-human to be greedy, the impoverished instructor of the course offered to buy my texts for me out of her own pocket, the hotel managers said, "We trust you. Why worry? Enjoy Vienna!" and the director of the foreign department at the bank offered to guarantee an overdraft on my miniscule checking account if I needed a little extra "to enjoy the weekend!"

In the course for foreigners there were people from both sides of the iron curtain. It was a delightful experience to share opinions and hopes with people of completely different backgrounds and training. The ages of the participants ranged from about 18 to about 70. The instructor was a lady born in Vienna in the old days, married to a Polish nobleman, living winters in Warsaw and summers in Vienna.

The course was difficult and stimulating work. We wrote papers and gave talks on books we had read or on widely varied, assigned topics; for example, the defense or prosecution of a thief, the significance or insignificance of modern art, our own countries, the prospect for world peace, et al. My efforts in the course were rewarded with the first prize for "accomplishments in the study of German," a book entitled "Die Wiener Universität im Bild, 1365-1965." I cherish it.

The Viennese whom I met are quietly pleased that despite all that has happened to Austria and Vienna over the centuries, their university has weathered the storms, one by one, and has

survived to celebrate its six hundredth anniversary, now, of course, its six hundred and first year.

From mid-October to mid-December I attended an evening course taught by an attractive, young woman who had just received her doctorate in German literature, and while the course was supposedly of the same level of difficulty as the summer course, it was oriented much more toward literature and grammar. In that course I met many more fine people including a Russian gentleman who works for the International Atomic Energy Commission in Vienna. We had some heated discussions, I can tell you, and I think each finally concluded that the other was a sincere person though totally out of his mind politically. At the time I left Vienna he was enjoying an occasional night out with the boys with a young, American friend of mine who is so conservative that he thinks banks should charge their customers for storing their money. That should be a spirited set of discussions! One is tempted to write a short story, "The Bolshevik and the Banker."

During the days I visited as many classes as possible at the university and read in the main library of the University and in the library of the Germanistisches Institut der Universität Wien. I read literature from all the German-speaking areas of Europe with some concentration on politically oriented literature. I wanted to try to find out what some of the tricks were that were used from early times through the Nazi period to appeal to the emotions of intellectuals who ought to know better. It was enlightening and discouraging to note that some of the same old tricks are dusted off for each new and unsuspecting generation. The techniques are well-nigh universal and are still in use on both sides of the iron curtain.

In addition to seminars on Thomas Mann, Hartmann von Aue, and Walther von der Vogelweide, I attended some lectures on the Austrian novel, the history of Vienna, General Biology, Comparative Anatomy, General Psychology, and just about any other lecture where there was an open door and an empty seat. I even attended a convention of judges! In almost any lecture one learns a new word or phrase or a new use for an old one or hears a new application of an old grammatical principle; once in a great while, one even hears a "rule" broken.

To make my "saturation" with German complete I purchased a small, multi-waveband radio with which I could listen to broadcasts from all Europe, and a small television set which I watched often.

I made an effort to get acquainted with young people from different countries and to listen to their interests, hopes, and anxieties. I found them very much like our students, but with a greater sense of the importance and urgency of study. They don't like it any better than our students do, but they see it as a passport to becoming one of the elite in intellect, income, and service. One of many little human things that pleased and touched me simultaneously was watching foreign students read letters from home. Whether they were reading from top to bottom, left to right, or right to left, the smiles on their faces were identical. Although I'm very dubious about generalizations, I cannot deny that my overall impression of the young people whom I met is most favorable. They give me optimism and hope for the future. Most want to be not merely elite, but useful citizens.

One of innumerable delightful experiences I had in Austria followed a heated discussion on the writings of an Austrian novelist of yester-year, Adelbert Stifter. Several had said

that he was hopelessly romantic and that there were no places such as he described in his novels, so I got in my car and drove to some villages in the general area about which he wrote. And, if anything, he underwrites! This leads me to wonder how much fine literature may have been denied us because some cynical publisher living in an ugly part of an ugly city didn't have brains enough to spend his week-ends elsewhere.

At Christmas time I returned home, and in January I went by Air New Zealand to Auckland. I found new Zealand a beautiful, lush land of friendly but somewhat reserved people. On North Island I traveled up to the Bay of Islands, visited a stand of Kauri trees, once plentiful in New Zealand but badly dessimated by greedy lumber companies in the past. Then I returned to Auckland for a few days to get better acquainted with that city.

I also visited Wellington, Picton, Christchurch, Dunedin, Invercargill, Te Anau, Queenstown, Wanaka, and Mount Cook.

As a linguist I found the different pronunciations of English words worthy of attention. In some areas, for example, "stone" is still pronounced very much as it was a thousand years ago in England when English and late Old High German were essentially the same language. Other pronunciations tended to confirm lectures I heard by Dr. Kranzmeyer at the University of Vienna. He stated that it is often possible to tell from where the ancestors of immigrants came by their pronunciation. In countries where there is little migration, it is often possible to establish the borders of long-vanished states by the pronunciations of people living in the area today!

My visit to Australia was shorter than I had hoped, but I managed to visit Sydney which I thoroughly enjoyed. It is a

dynamic city most of whose citizens apparently delight in robust physical activity as well as in the city's cultural achievements.

I also visited a place called "Surfers' Paradise." The town, in Queensland, is well-named. The water is just the right temperature, and the miles and miles of beautiful, sandy beaches are excellent for surfing or swimming. In Australia too I was impressed by the friendliness and kindness of people whom I met. For one example, when I asked the manager of a car-rental agency if it would be possible to hire a driver since I was afraid to drive on the left, he took the day off, and he and his wife and I had a wonderful trip to a bird sanctuary, an aquarium, and through some rural areas to a water-ski exhibition. On that trip we visited a professor who couldn't stand teaching any longer and had gone into business for himself. He manufactures boomerangs! I have one, and since he exports to the entire world, I also possess a set of instructions in German on how to throw a boomerang in a manner unlikely to kill any of your neighbors or yourself.

I visited the German Department of the University of Brisbane where I was cordially received and offered a job. Their situation is different from ours, but it looks as if we may have the same situation in a few years, viz. their students come to them with four years of good high school German behind them. It is possible that we too shall have to separate "College German" from "Elementary German." They are justly proud that their graduates are able to go to German universities as graduate students and do excellent work with no allowance whatsoever for the fact that they are foreigners educated more than half a world away from Germany.

Since sabbatical leaves are not common in much of Europe, I was pleased to hear that the directors of the University of Brisbane consider them so important that they grant one after every sixth year and pay full salary plus a travel allowance of fifteen hundred Australian dollars (about sixteen hundred and fifty American dollars.)

From Brisbane I returned to Sydney by train, and then took a plane by way of Adelaide and Perth to Singapore.

I stayed two days in Singapore, said to be Asia's most progressive city. I admired the new buildings, was appalled by the climate, repelled by the filth, and deeply saddened to talk with people on the street and learn that most care nothing about South Vietnam or that Americans die there; indeed, those with whom I talked all felt that America was meddling in matters that did not concern it, and that the casualty figures were "innocent villagers." The American casualties were of less than no importance.

On the first day of spring I returned to Vienna, not the center of the civilized world, but certainly the center of the world of civilized people.

I visited more classes during the days, got acquainted with more young people, visited the evening course again, attended more theatre, opera, and cinema, read more in the library, and took some brief trips to Italy, Germany, Switzerland, and France.

I was pleased to find that in France the French still treat human beings on an individual basis and still have the glorious knack of ignoring the fact that their government is in disagreement with the government of some individual whom they happen to

like. (When I was a student in Paris in 1948-49, a Frenchman told me, "Well, when all's said and done, it's cheaper to elect them and then ignore them than to lock them up in the mental institutions where they belong." There are still many Frenchmen with this attitude, Saints be praised!) My former landlady in Paris dismissed de Gaulle and his policies with an airy wave of her hand and a simple sentence I heard many times from other French citizens, "Ça ne va pas durer." (That isn't going to last.) Most French people with whom I talked disagreed with much of American policy, but they added, "but France and America have been friends too long to let a temporary difficulty ruin their relationship."

In June I attended another course at the university especially for professors of German. It was taught by an excellent instructor, well-known in Europe, Dr. Leo Kober. Unfortunately he was ill the last week, but I gained a great deal from the course. I am proud of his remark, "One would believe he hears the author himself speaking when you read aloud, Herr Ninneman."

In August, 1966, I left "my" lovely Vienna with much regret at the same time that I was eager to see my friends, "my" lovely California, and my beautiful, beautiful American gadgets.

I drove across another segment of Germany and France to Le Havre where I shipped my car back to New York on a U.S. Lines Freighter, and then sailed about a week later on the S.S. United States. The trip home was pleasaat, and, of course, the Statue of Liberty was a welcome sight in the early morning sunlight.

During the twenty-four hours I was in New York City I encountered more disinterested, curt, rude barbarians than in all

the rest of my trip around the world or my months in Europe. I learned in Vienna that people can be on the brink of poverty and still be kind, gentle, good-humored, and eager to help. I see no excuse for the richest city on earth to condone and even encourage its savage attitudes and value-systems.

From New York I drove back to California. (People became civilized again in Pennsylvania.) I stopped for a few days in Los Alamos to visit friends and to inquire about the place of German scientific literature in their research in the peaceful applications of nuclear energy.

My enthusiasm for sabbaticals is so boundless, I hardly know where to begin. The chance to apply what he already knows and to learn more every waking moment is one of the greatest experiences a linguist can have. Travelling around the world and in four or five European countries has lifted my hopes for the survival of humanity and renewed my faith in the essential goodness of mankind. My German is much improved, and my teaching enthusiasm has been rejuvenated to the point that I find myself in the enviable position of having the enthusiasms of a beginning teacher and the knowledge of one who has been at it for seventeen years and just learned some new teaching tricks on his sabbatical.

I am deeply grateful.

WIENER INTERNATIONALE HOCHSCHULKURSE

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Ehrenschrift

Der Bundesminister für Unterricht

Der Bürgermeister der Stadt Wien

Der Rektor der Universität Wien

ZEUGNIS

Herr Wesley Ninneman
Frau _____
Fräulein _____
aus Claremont (Staat: U. S. A.)
hat in der Zeit vom 30./VIII. 1965 bis zum 25./IX. 1965

die

Deutschen Sprachkurse für Ausländer

(Kurs IV a)

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Grammatik: sehr gut (19)
Wortschatz: sehr gut (19)
Konversation: ausgezeichnet (20)
Schriftliche Übungen: sehr gut (19)
Aufsatz: sehr gut (19)
Literarische Interpretation: sehr gut (19)
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Für die Leitung:

Pincker

Univ.-Doz. Dr. Hans Pincker
Direktor der Sprachkurse



Lehrkraft:

Malyola Sedjchowska

Wien, den 24./IX 1965

Dieses Zeugnis gilt nur für das Ausland