

VACATIONS – CHAPTER THIRTEEN

as of 8/19/2011

2002 – GERMANY, FRANCE, AUSTRIA AND SWITZERLAND

– Isabel, Bill, Katie, and Sarah

June 17 – July 1, 2002

Monday, June 17 - Philadelphia, British Airways Flight 68V 9:15 p.m.
to London, arrive Tuesday, June 18, 9:20 a.m. - depart 10:50 am flight #
950 N - to Munich – arrive 1:40 p.m.

Return - Tuesday, July 2, Munich, British Airways Flight 950N 1:20 pm
Arrive London 2:25 pm - depart 4:15 pm -
arrive Philadelphia 7:10 pm



Kate, Sarah, Isabel, Pop Pop

Monday, June 17, 2002

Leaving our home in Wayne, we drove to Bev's in Wallingford to get our granddaughters Kate Vesper and Sarah Vesper for another trip to our favorite vacation-land. They are the third and fourth grandchildren we have taken with us on these European trips. (Jimmy in '97 and '98, Lisa in '98). Bev packed hoagies for us which we ate in the Philadelphia Airport waiting for our 9:20 pm flight. Though it was raining, thundering and lightning when we took off, we had a smooth flight to Heathrow Airport in London.

Tuesday, June 18, 2002

Arriving at Heathrow at about 9 am, we are waited for our connection to Munich at 10:50 am. After a slight delay, we boarded a smaller British Airways plane with a center aisle and three seats on each side. The TV screens are placed about every four seats, not like the larger planes with a screen on the back of the seat in front of us. But, it is interesting to view the screen as it shows the flight path of the plane as it passes over the English Channel, Brussels, Frankfurt, and approaches Munich. A broader view shows the names of other cities such as Luxembourg, Mannheim, Saarbrucken, and other places where we have also been privileged to visit.

After exchanging money and getting our Opel Astra 4-door sedan, we didn't have enough room in the trunk for our baggage. We finally got an Astra caravan and headed out to the Prison Camp at Dachau. Unfortunately, we arrived only a few minutes before their closing hour and could not get in.

Driving on to the center of Munich, we stopped at two large cathedrals and the Marienplatz to see the large Glockenspiel (clock), but we missed the hour for the display of all the moving mechanical characters - much like the Astronomical Clock in Strasbourg, France.



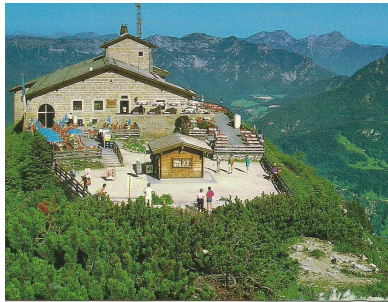
Munich City Hall and Glockenspiel clock



Driving East toward Salzburg, Austria, we stopped for the night at the Landhotel in Irschenberg, Germany, ate supper on the large garden patio and enjoyed the unusually hot evening.

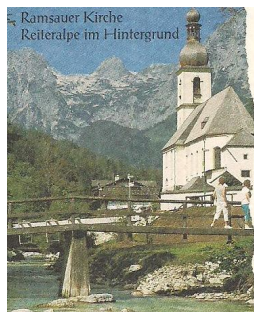
Wednesday, June 19, 2002

Traveling on to Berchtesgaden, Germany, we parked and rode a bus up the mountain to Eagle's Nest (Kehlsteinhaus), Hitler's retreat, built for his 50th birthday. The view from the top of the mountain at 1834 meters (6,148 feet) is fantastic. The one building is right on the very top of the peak. Oddly enough, just a few feet from the building is a very large Cross, that seems contradictory to all that Hitler did and said.



In this photo of Kehlsteinhaus - Eagle's Nest - note at bottom right the bus parking area and entrance way to tunnel and elevator (which by the way is mostly brass.) Kate, Isabel, Pop Pop, Kate.

Returning to the valley, we motored on to the Salt Mines at Hallein, Austria, only to find out that once again that they were closing for the day. We decided to stay in the area and found the Gasthof Altes Forsthaus, a motel with restaurant in Ramsau, Germany, another of our favorite places. We had evening snack at the Wellnesshotel Hochkal Ter. also in Ramsau.

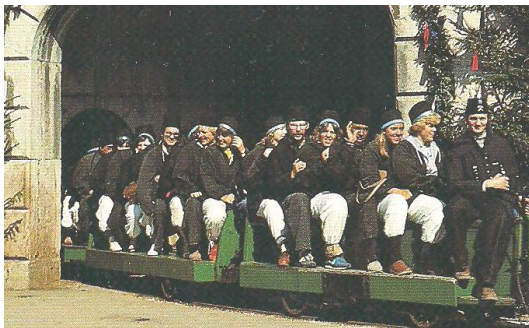


Ramsau, Germany - Gasthof Altes Forsthaus

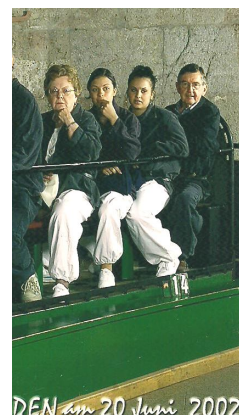
Thursday, June 20, 2002

After fruhstuck we went to the Salt Mines where we were given special miner's clothing to wear over our own. Included was a leather seat which we strapped around us and sat on as we boarded a small miner's "train" that took us deep into the mountain. We then sat on two very shiny and smooth rails in order to slide down to the lower level where salt was extracted from the walls. We saw the various types of machinery used by the miners, and got onto small flat-bottom barges holding about twenty people and crossed an underground salt lake, about 100' feet diameter. We were then shown the large pumping system used to pipe the saline water to the salt processing plants several kilometers away. As we left the mine on the small railroad cars, we were given a tiny container of salt.

Up to the time that we had first visited the salt mine in a previous year with Jimmy and Lisa, it seems that none of us had given any thought to the manner or methods used to provide us with this everyday necessity. Neither am I aware of any similar methods used in the United States with men actually going underground or into mountains to extract the salt. From all that we knew, we thought that pipes were driven into the ground, or underground areas, where salt could be found, and that water was pumped in and then out as saline. More inquiry must be made.



The Miner's Train



Isabel, Kate, Sarah, Pop Pop on slide and Miner's Train

From the salt mines, we drove into Salzburg, Austria and toured the famous fortress above the city. What a remarkable place with its museum filled with artifacts and armor dating back to the Middle Ages. This is city that we all came to know in the movie "Sound of Music."

In the center of the city is a very large cathedral along side of which is a statue of Amadeus Mozart. On the sidewalk in the central square, with small shops and food stands, is a very large chess board with plastic chessman as tall as three feet. Anyone can step up to play.



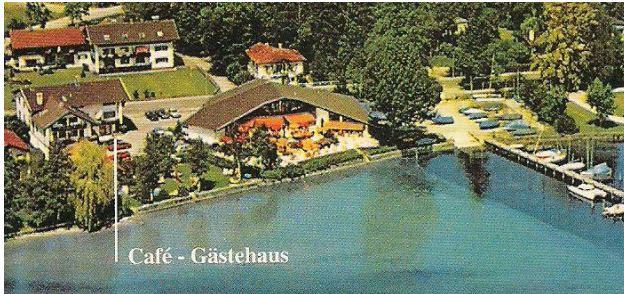
Sarah and Kate at Chessboard in Salzburg, Austria

From there, we crossed the Danube River and drove to Oberndorf, Austria to see the chapel built on the site where the Christmas carol "Silent Night, Holy Night" was written. Though the original church is no longer there, the small memorial chapel which could probably seat a hundred or so, has two beautiful stain-glass windows honoring Franz Gruber and Joseph Mohr who wrote the carol.

Here we ate pizza in a nearby restaurant and then drove to Gasthaus Kaltner in Seebruck, Germany overlooking a very large lake, the Chiemsee.

Friday, June 21, 2002

The girls had their own room at the Gasthaus Kaltner and said it was infested with all kinds of flying insects - probably mosquitoes. Nevertheless, they decided that they couldn't stay in the room and went down to the Lobby and sat there until daylight. When we got up we saw many small boats sailing on the Chiemsee. After Frühstück, a great one with a variety of cold meats, cheeses, eggs, rolls, coffee, etc., we took Isabel to the hairdressers right across the street, and the girls and I took a boat to the Herrenchiemsee Castle, built by King Ludwig II, on an island in the middle of the lake. Isabel, Jimmy and I had been there before, so she was more interested in having her hair done than returning to the castle. Wow, what a site. Fountains, gardens, and a building filled with gold, porcelain and overwhelming beauty. One room was dedicated to the famous composer Richard Wagner, a favorite of the king's.



Gasthaue Kaltner on the Cheimsee



Sarah and Kate at Chiemsee Castle

Going back to the mainland to get Isabel, we then drove on to the Tirolerhof Hotel in Lermoos, Austria. Again at a favorite place, our rooms look out and up to the Zugspitze, the highest mountain in Germany, and one that sits on the border of the two countries.

Here at Tirolerhof, we found out that Bev had called the owner, Evelyn Schonger, to send greetings to Kate and Sarah. Knowing that we would arrive late, we had stopped for supper along the route. But then, before going to bed, Kate and Sarah brought coffee and tea to us which we enjoyed as we sat on the balcony outside our room as we marveled at the sight of the mountains. This hotel is tops. It has three levels with private balconies outside each room. The small town is very quiet and is surrounded by mountains on every side.



Tirolerhof in Lermoos

Saturday, June 22, 2002

Here at Tirolerhof we had fruhstuck in a beautiful room and lots to eat. On a very hot day we went to the Linderhof Castle which is tucked away in the mountains. The gardens, the reflecting pool, the cascading waterfalls facing the King's bedroom, the man-made lake in the grotto, and the magnificent interior design of the castle are very difficult to describe. For me, this one is the best of all.



Linderhof and Neuschwanstein

We then went to Neuschwanstein Castle which is probably the most famous of Ludwig's castles because Walt Disney modeled his castle at Disney World after it. We rode the horse-drawn carriage to the top of the mountain and waited for the designated time to be admitted. Thought the exterior architecture is marvelous to see, the interior does not compare with either Linderhof or Herrenchiemsee castles. Neither are there any surrounding gardens or fountains. Nevertheless, it is a must to see.

Going back to Tirolerhof and supper at a nearby restaurant - Italian, to satisfy our Italian granddaughters - we were informed that the "fires on the Mountain" celebration to mark the beginning of Summer would be that night. Just as last year, we were able to sit on the balcony and watch as it got dark, a fire light up here and there, high on the mountains, some in the form of a cross, a horse, two hands, and several other designs. We ere told that the celebrants climbed the mountains during the day and made it an all night affair. After going to bed about 10:30 and waking about 1:00 am, it was interesting to see the fires still burning.

Sunday, June 23, 2002

On this calm and peaceful Sunday morning we went a couple of blocks from the Tirolerhof to a nearby Catholic Church for morning worship. Though we did not understand the language it was a good feeling to pause for a while and sense the presence of the Lord as we were surrounded by His glorious creation and His people, known to Him, though unknown to us.



Pop Pop, Kate, Sarah, Isabel at Zugspitz.

After the service we drove to the cable car that transported us high up to the top of the Zugspitze (2964 meters - 9,724 feet) to see the magnificent mountains. From the cable car we could see some of the people who had lit the fires the night before as they were now descending to the town. It was so cold up there that we were all wearing jackets - even though it was the last week of June. The peak is reached from both German and Austria by different methods, and at the top, both nations have a tourist building with a restaurant, gift shop and sight-seeing platforms. Very interesting is the fact that as high up as it is, there is a connecting metal walkway that enables the visitor to go from side to side. It is also the beginning point for those who wish to ski the surrounding mountains at that height.

Leaving the area, and heading southwest, we purposely took a unplanned route in order to enter Italy. I joked with my granddaughters that it was I, not their Italian grandfather, that actually took them to their "Homeland." We simply crossed the border, went into an Italian restaurant to eat and purchased a few things in the gift shop. Kate and Sarah were so happy to be able to buy an Italian flag for their brothers. It hangs today in their hoagie shop in Berwyn.

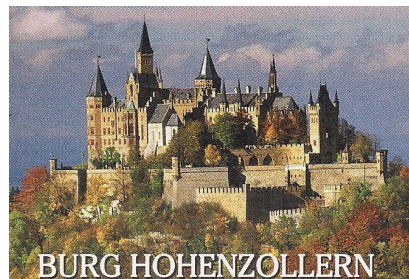


Still traveling West, we headed into Switzerland and when attempting to cross the mountains by way of a tunnel, we got to the entrance and found that we were boarding an auto-train. We drove onto it and sat in our car - in the dark - for the 18 minute trip through the mountain, saving a long twisty drive across the top. Very interesting.

At the exit end of the tunnel we proceeded to the tiny country of Lichtenstein, drove on through to Switzerland, and stopped for the night at the Restaurant Guest Haus Schafli in Frumsen, Switzerland.

Monday, June 24, 2002

It rained this morning but clearing as we headed to Castle Hohenzollern located in Hechingen, Germany far away from everything on the top of a mountain that seems to stand alone. The castle can be seen from many miles away. Finding the parking lot halfway up the mountain, we left the car there and rode a bus to the entrance.



Here again, there are no gardens or fountains in or around the complex; but the interior is beautiful and kept in good condition. In the entrance room, very large, with a ceiling that must be 15 feet or more high, two walls contain a decorative genealogical tree with branches and leaves listing names of the family and the years they lived.

Because the floors are wood and highly polished, each visitor is issued a pair of oversize slip-ons covering one's shoes. As you slip along through one room after another, you find that you are not only protecting the wood floor but polishing it as well.

While there, we ate lunch, picking up a sandwich at the outdoor snack bar.

Our next stop was at the Dottlebacher-Muhle hotel and restaurant in Bad-Peterstahl-Griesbach, Germany, for the night.

Tuesday, June 25, 2002

We wanted to get an early start today to get to Strasbourg, France to see and hear the famous Astronomical Clock in the Notre-Dame Cathedral at noon. This unbelievably large clock-structure stands in the corner of the church to the side of the chancel. It is about twenty feet tall and has numerous moveable parts including figures of Jesus and his twelve disciples. At the striking at midday, the action begins with the crowing of the cock, the passing by of the disciples in front of Jesus, and other actions such as the turning upside down of an hour glass.



Strasbourg Cathedral

It was then time for Kate and Sarah to join me in the climb up the 330 steps to the observation level on the roof of the cathedral. Arriving there, we realized that the bell tower loomed even higher above us. The view across the city of Strasbourg and the country-side, including the Rhine River was magnificent.

Leaving the city, we crossed the Rhine again, this time on the little uncovered ferry boat at Ratstatt and arrived back in Germany. The ferry, which can hold about 8 or 10 cars. is attached to a large cable that stretches from the French side to Germany, and is powered simply by the river current. The pilot also has to time the crossing between the enormously large barges that ply the Rhine carrying coal, automobiles, and a variety of other goods.

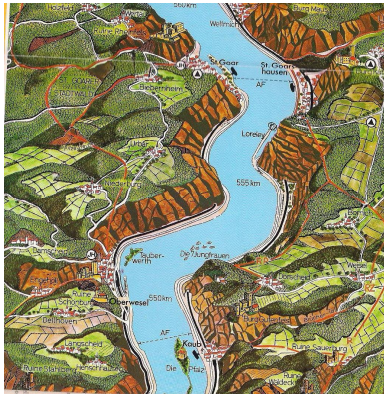
At about 6:00 pm we arrived at Heidelberg Castle only to find that it was closed until the next day. We walked the grounds surrounding it and viewed the Neckar River below.

Finally, the long day came to a close when we found the Aston Hotel in Hirschberg-Heidelberg, Germany and enjoyed a very good buffet supper and turned in for the night.

Wednesday, June 26, 2002

Because this hotel, unlike most of the guest houses or pensions where we have stayed, did not include breakfast in the price of the room, we decided the additional cost was too high and chose to stop at McDonalds - ugh!

We then drove to the town of Kaub on the Rhine, caught a tour boat and traveled to the beautiful town of Goarshausen. Like so many other places along the Rhine, there were many shops along the main street which is always closed to auto traffic. After walking and walking, we got on the boat again for the return trip. Just being on the boat and looking at the ruins of many Medieval castles, or vineyards on the hillsides, or watching various other boats pass by, is always an interesting experience.



Rhine River



Driving away from the river to the top of a mountain we found the Landgasthaus Blucher in Weisel, (or Dorscheid) Germany. It is operated by Familie Fetz who were so cordial to us. (We stayed here again on a later trip in 2004 with Beth, Jim, Debbie and Chris). When they showed us two rooms, the larger one had an interesting rug on the floor. It was made from the furry skin of a mountain hog, with the head still attached. The girls were repulsed by it and chose the smaller adjoining room. It was very appropriate for them with a canopied bed.



Landgasthaus Blucher - Dorscheid

Thursday, June 27, 2002

Early this morning I arose and found a wooden bench outside the gastehaus where I could enjoy the beauty of the surrounding hills, the distant vineyards, and the sight of the Rhine River far below. There are no houses or buildings in sight, the sky is blue with only a few streaks of a vapor trail behind a far-away airplane. The temperature in the low 60's with a slight wind blowing. I shall remember this moment for a long time to come.

When I was a boy, little did I ever realize that I would someday be in Germany, far from home, enjoying something like this. Wow!

We ate fruhstuck in the very large dining room here at Landgasthaus Blucher and then went for a boat trip on the Rhine at Kaub. This is a large boat on the Koln-Dusseldorf line with two large decks and a beautiful carpeted dining room with windows on both sides. I, of course, prefer to sit on the upper outside deck when the weather is good.



Boppard on Rhine, Germany

We arrived at Boppard on the Rhine, and walked the street of shops. When we got back on the boat and were eating in the dining room we noticed a group of school children enjoying the trip. We met two of the boys, Jendrick Kloos and Jens Maier, and asked their teacher if we could get their addresses and write to them later. With his permission I sent them a postcard telling them how impressed we were with their behavior on board. (On our trip in the following year with Chris and Jessie, we found out that both lived just a few miles from Landgasthaus Blucher where we were staying again. We drove to Jen's home, surprised him and his parents as we knocked on the door and spent a few moments to say hello).

In the village of Kaub there is a memorial statue of General Gebhard von Blucher, a German general who defeated Napoleon.

After returning to the guesthouse for a rest, we then went to Rudesheim for supper at an outdoor cafe.



Rudesheim on the Rhine

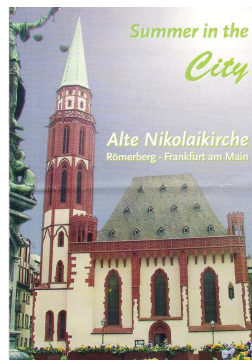
Friday, June 28, 2002

This morning in my walk around the guesthouse, I found a covered wooden gazebo down the hill overlooking the Rhine. Totally isolated and quiet, I noted in the distance the little town of Oberwiesel. What a sight. After fruhstuck, we were invited to see the Wine Cellar operated by the sons of Mr. Fetz, the owner of Landgasthaus Blucher. He showed us the grape presses, numerous bottles of various shapes and sizes, the vats, and the storage areas. Grapes are harvested in from October 4 to November 4 and then processed for sale beginning in May. They sell 30,000 to 40,000 bottles each year, and have several thousand acres with vineyards on the hills of the Rhine.

Taking Isabel to the hairdressers in the village of Kaub, Katy, Sarah and I drove to see the statue of Lorelei on a little spit of land stretching out along the shore-line of the Rhine. Parking the car, we walked a half-mile or so to see this large 20 foot high bronze statue of Lorelei as she supposedly sang enticingly to the sailors as they sailed through the narrow strait of the river. The famous song about her is played on the tour boats as they pass the site. Interestingly, we sang the same song in our assemblies when I was in grammar school in Lakewood, NJ in the 1930's.

When Kate, Sarah and I got to the statue and looked up at this nude beauty sitting on a large rock overlooking the river, we found that some graffiti scoundrels had splashed bright yellow paint on two areas of her fabulous body. (no comment!)

Returning to get Isabel, we then drove on to Frankfurt, saw the I.G. Farben Building that I had been in during my Army tour there in 1946-7, and where General Eisenhower had his headquarters, walked and shopped on the Zeil shopping promenade, saw the Opera House, the Dom Cathedral and the St. Nicolai (St Paul's) Church. My friend, Rev. Jeff Myers, a former pastor at the Calvary-Highland Park Presbyterian Church in Upper Darby, PA is the pastor there with his wife. Going to his apartment to say hello, he took us back to the church and up to the walkway on the roof where dignitaries used to sit to view celebrations in the Romerberg plaza below.



St. Nicolai Kirche

Leaving Frankfurt, we drove to Kreuz Wertheim and found the Hotel in den Herrenwiesen where we stayed after supper in the restaurant Landgasthof Franz nearby.

Saturday, June 29, 2002

Starting on our way to Rothenburg ob der Tauber, we stopped at a little bakery for breakfast with coffee, tea, juices and German pastries. mmm, good.

Arriving at Pension Becker where we had stayed before, we met Gaetano who operates the guesthouse with his wife Lydia. (A Pension is a small German guest house with fruhstuck (free breakfast also provided.) He is also a cook at one of the restaurants in town. The rooms here are very small but the location and price are just right. And the two owners were so pleasant and helpful.



Gaetano & Lydia - Pension Becker

I called Ulrich Knorr, organist at the big St. Jakob's Cathedral, and we had coffee together at a nearby cafe.

In the afternoon, we stood at the center city-hall square to hear a traveling musical band of students from Wisconsin, USA. This seems to be a favorite place for choirs and bands from the States to visit and perform. Watch them on the Rothenburg Web-cam.

Sunday, June 30, 2002

On a beautiful, cool Sunday, we worshipped at the St. Jakob's Cathedral where several instruments accompanied the organ during the prelude and service. We then went with Ulrich Knorr to another church, Franciscan, just a few blocks away, to hear the organ there. The same minister, with a very small congregation. Just why the two churches and the two services, I didn't find out.

We drove to the city of Bayreuth, Germany to see the Festspielhaus built by opera composer Richard Wagner. Though it was closed until the season starts in the middle of July through August, we walked around outside and had lunch in the adjoining cafe. Even if the season had begun, we would not have seen a performance without tickets purchased months in advance.

In the center of town we visited Wagner's home, Wahnfried, which is now a museum. Fabulous. Walking through, I could not but help remember the stories told by Wagner's granddaughter Friedelinde of the frequent visits to their home by Adolf Hitler who admired Wagner so much. One tale was of the way that everyone had to be quiet in the mornings while Hitler was still sleeping until well after noon. They had to roll the car out of the garage, and down the street, before starting it, because it was so noisy.



Richard Wagner House and Museum - Bayreuth, Germany

While in Bayreuth on that Sunday afternoon, the final day of the soccer World Cup tournament, we heard that the Germany soccer team lost to Brazil, but the sports fans in the area were riding all around town blowing their horns and celebrating at being the runner-ups.

Then back to Pension Becker for the night.

Monday, July 1, 2002

This morning, Sarah, Kate and I walked to the top tower of City Hall overlooking the square or plaza. The steps to the top are nothing more than a twelve step lean-to latter with a flimsy railing. At the top of the ladder which meets the floor of the walk-around below the peak, you have to crawl out on all fours, and then stand. I am sure that safety regulations here in the USA would prohibit access to the top.



Rothenburg City Hall and Tower

Our next stop was to the Criminal Museum with its four floors of Medieval torture implements. Unbelievable unless you see them for yourself. Thumbscrews, chastity belts, face masks to hold the tongue, body- and limb-stretching tables, etc.

We went back to the Dachau Prison Camp but found that it was closed on Mondays. Another disappointment.

Moving on, we went to the BMW auto museum where the girls bought a souvenir key chain for the father/owner of a BMW.



BMW HEADQUARTERS AND MUSEUM

We then walked over to the nearby Munich Olympic Center of fame. It was then time to head toward the Munich Airport and find a guest house close enough that we could make an early departure in the morning for our home-bound trip. We stayed at Hotel Gasthof Gumberger Gaden in Eittinge, just about three miles from the airport. It was not the best and had seen better days. Not the most memorable place to stay on our last night. Oh well.

Tuesday, July 2, 2002

Arose early, drove to the airport, checked in our car and waited for our 1:20 departure. We then heard the public announcement requesting the Zulker/Vesper party to report to the ticket counter. Earlier I had dropped the envelope in which we had our boarding passes, and apparently one dropped out. It was mine, and was found by security. Then just as we were boarding, Katy was asked to step aside. A Security guard had her suitcase which had been rejected. They asked Kate to open it for further inspection. She had three cigarette lighters which she had purchased as gifts for her friends, but only one is allowed per suitcase. They gave one to me, one to Sarah, one to Kate, and let her pass.

Leaving Munich we flew to London, changed planes again and took off for Philadelphia, arriving home in the evening.

Places visited on this trip

- Irschenberg, Germany
- Ramsau, Germany
- Seebruck, Chiemensee
- Lermoos, Austria
- Frumsen, Switzerland
- Bad Petersbach/Griesbach, Germany
- Hirschberg, Heidelberg, Germany
- Dorschied Germany,
- Kreuzwertheim, Germany
- Rothenberg, Germany
- Gaden, Germany
- Strasbourg, France
- London, England

THE END - CHAPTER THIRTEEN
8/19/2011