

Marshall Butler
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The Pleasures and Perils of Travels Abroad

Before making a trip to Europe, a person should be absolutely sure he and his clothes understand one another. An article of clothing that behaves in a seemly and becoming manner in America may change completely in a foreign country. A case in point is a light-weight dark blue jacket I own.

In the summer of 1988 Mary Helen Adams organized a tour of Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Italy. We joined ^a group from Tennessee and flew from Nashville to New York together. In addition to various and sundry other articles of clothing I was wearing was the aforementioned jacket. Until we boarded the plane to cross the ocean, "old Slick Pockets," (as I later named the coat) had shown no animosity whatsoever. In fact, we had dwelt in perfect harmony.

During the flight I became somewhat warm and took off the dark blue lightweight number and laid it across my knees. I had put my traveler's checks and my passport in the coat pockets. When we finally arrived at the airport in Munich we gathered our belongings and boarded our bus which took us to the hotel.

After checking in at our hotel we went to our rooms to freshen up a bit. I took off said jacket and laid it upon the bed. After unpacking, I reached for my traveler's checks in the pocket of the coat to find to my discomfort that there were no traveler's checks in it. With mounting concern I searched through everything I had with me, but finally had to admit that old Slick Pockets had betrayed me.

There is something about arriving penniless in a foreign country ^{that} doesn't put one at his best. With increasing agitation I confided to Mary Helen the foul thing that had happened to me. She, being the seasoned traveler that she is, suggested that we

look for the American Express Office. Within walking distance of the hotel we found the place and within an hour my funds were restored to me.

Abut two weeks after we got back home, I received the lost traveler's checks from the airlines. Slick Pockets had thrown them on the floor of the plane before we landed in Munich.

Being in the chips again, I felt like celebrating and thought it would be fun to have our evening meal in a typically Bavarian restaurant. Near the hotel we found such a place and several of us dined there together. You can hardly get more typically Bavarian than "Wendy's."

The morning after the delightful repast at Wendy's we met our tour guide for the trip. Her name was Monica. Monica had a number of delightful attributes including dimples, a cousin in every town where we spent the night, and a deep seated dislike for the tour members knowing anything about what they were seeing. I thought it interesting that all of her cousins were male.

The first stop on our tour was the Nymphenburg Palace on the outskirts of Munich. I was eagerly looking forward to seeing the palace, but Monica said that we did not have time to go inside it. In dismay I said, "Don't we even get to see the Amalienburg?" Immediately the smile disappeared - taking the dimples with it. In my sensitive way I realized I had done the unforgivable - I had displayed prior knowledge of what we were not going to see. With a sharpened quality of voice - and no dimples - she said, "How did you know about that?" I replied that I have a book on European palaces. From that time on I was clearly a person to be viewed with suspicion.

Our hotel in Munich was on Goethe Strasse (or Goethe Street) and I, in my

winning way, asked M. if there were a street named for the composer, Richard Strauss. "Oh yes," said she - dimpling - "he was born here." Unthinkingly I said, "Yes, I know he was." That did it. She shouted, "You know everything." She was so outraged that when I asked her a question in Venice she wouldn't even answer me.

In the Tennessee group was a young lady who was just graduated from high school. It was abundantly clear to her (if to no one else) that she was the 1988 answer to Marilyn Monroe. I don't know about her, no doubt, numerous conquests when we were not together as a group, but I did witness one episode. One day in Luzern we had some free time, and several of us had gone somewhere or another across the river. On returning, at the other end of the bridge, we saw the high school group all in a flutter. On the outskirts of the group a young man was hanging about. Although there were many attractive young ladies standing together, M. Monroe instinctively knew that she was the object of his interest. The other girls had to comfort her in her agitation. He just wouldn't take his eyes off of her. We decided that with so many of them to protect her she was in no danger of being kidnapped, and we returned to the hotel. We learned later that he got up his nerve and approached them. The "femme fatale," as I called her, had a shattering experience. He was not interested in her at all, but in one of our own Hopkinsville girls. Immediately, with startling clarity, 1988's Marilyn Monroe saw that he was not attractive at all and she couldn't imagine why she had ever bothered to notice him. He was a young Italian medical student. On the morning that we left Luzern he came to the hotel and had breakfast with us and he and our Hopkinsville girl parted with tearful eyes.

This account is not in chronological order. Actually, Luzern was our last stop before boarding the plane at Frankfurt for the return home. However, this is a good time to mention the new attack upon me by Slick Pockets.

The afternoon before we were to leave for Frankfurt, I thought it would show a great deal of common sense if I checked to see that all was in order. Once again I reached into the pocket of the dark blue lightweight article for my passport. Empty! Slick Pockets had struck again!

I looked for - and found - Johann, our bus driver, and asked where the bus was. I did not dare let Monica know about this. Aside from the fact that she would be nasty as the devil, I did not (in my kind way) want to upset her last night with a cousin.

The bus was many blocks from the hotel, but Johann and I walked to it. He unlocked it and I searched thoroughly but in vain for the passport. I didn't tell Johann what I was looking for because I was afraid he would tell the dimpled one. We came back in the bus and I, in declining morale, went up to my room. My roommate was there, and upon learning of my dilemma, he gave a casual glance around the room and saw the passport lying snugly under the corner of my bed. Obviously it and the lightweight object were in cahoots.

My throat has an amusing little trick. When I am eating it will sometimes close up so that I can't swallow. This is all right if one is in his own home, but leaves a little to be desired if one is in public. One was in public - in Switzerland to be exact. In a restaurant on top of the second highest mountain in the Swiss Alps, to be more exact. To be ridiculously exact - on top of Mount Titlis (not to be confused with "On Top of Old Smokey").

We were breaking our fast after a trip up the side of the mountain which I was convinced we would not survive. I was lunching in a contented sort of way when the old throat decided things were going too smoothly. With a mouth crammed with food I suddenly could not swallow. With deceptively carefree appearance (humming the latest tunes) I made my way to the men's room. After solving the problem to my complete satisfaction I returned to the table - outwardly unchanged.

The second attack was more spectacular - more dramatic in every way. We were in Luzern. (Now there's a place where things happen.) The entire group was having lunch in a large paved area on the banks of the river. This area adjoined a large building with an arcade in front of it. The sun was shining, the surroundings were beautiful, the food was good, the company was pleasant, the throat was closing. I tried to ignore it, and continued to shovel in the food. At last it came to my attention that things were not moving in the hoped for direction. With hand over mouth I arose from the table - not suavely as I had done on the mountain - but with discernable trepidation. Heading in the direction of the arcade, I moved with increasing speed and came into the shaded area where waiters and other people were standing.

I do not know if you have ever tried, while in full flight, and with hand over mouth, to ask someone who doesn't understand your language where the men's room is. It is not productive of results. Fortunately, a lovely lady of the Tennessee group recognized my condition as being something other than my naturally high spirits. She was able to make someone understand and showed me at the last possible moment that welcoming door. This time I did not emerge outwardly unchanged.

Of course, the solution to the problem is very simple - I should not eat while in

Switzerland. But that would definitely limit the amount of time I could spend there.

Among the many beautiful sights we saw in Bavaria were two of King Ludwig's castles. "Neuschwanstein" is almost unbelievable, perched as it is on top of the mountain. The other one, "Linderhof," is beautifully situated in a valley at the foot of a mountain.

Monica told us that "Linderhof" was a copy of Marie Antoinette's "Petit Trianon." The only noticeable similarity is that they both have doors and windows. I am not the world's fastest learner, but I did not take exception to Dimples' statement. There is a saying - "Once bitten, twice shy." I was twice bitten and about as shy as you can get.

When we got to Lugano, Switzerland, Johann, our bus driver, let us out in the part of the city at the foot of the mountain. We roamed around for quite a while and then started the climb up to our hotel. There are many beautiful sights on the climb including the beautiful old cathedral.

Our hotel was quite a distance up and it was across the railroad tracks from the train station. After unpacking we still had quite a bit of time before dinner and I wanted to see the lower town again on my own. On the way down I stopped again to admire the cathedral and the surroundings in general. After a while I decided it was time to go back up to the hotel so as not to be late for dinner.

Soon after passing the steps leading to the cathedral the narrow street branches in two different directions. I had no doubt about which one to take because we had come that way not very long before. I reached the train station but was somewhat non-plussed to see there was no hotel across from it. I knew it was impossible to tear down a big building and remove all possible signs of it in two hours

time. A certain amount of nervousness began to set in. I continued up the steep street and found no hotel. Walking quickly up and down the streets, I asked a number of people the way to my destination. Of course none of them spoke English. I went back to the station and asked a man sitting on a bench where the other railway station was. He said there wasn't another one, but suggested I go into the building where there was a woman who could help me.

Our hotel was the only hotel across from the station so I hadn't bothered to write the name in my little book. When I didn't even know where I was staying, it didn't give her much to work with. Finally she asked the name of the tour group and that I did know. After calling several establishments she located the right one.

But the hotel was across from the station! What had happened to it? She told me to go to the other end of the platform - and there it was.

I cannot, in all conscience, blame the lightweight dark blue jacket for what happened, but I certainly suspect the shoes for leading me up the wrong street.

Oddly enough, no one has asked me to take another trip.