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What a difference 8 months make. When I returned from my European odyssey last August I surely thought that was my one and only trip to visit my Romanian cousins and doing some genealogical research in the Ukraine. Time had a way of erasing my memories of difficulties and hardships encountered ... for by January 2002 I was itching to return to Europe. The notable difference was, of course, that Dolores would accompany me and that we would combine work and play during this trip. Additionally ... there was the motivation of perhaps again seeing cousin Laurentiu and a plan to meet cousin Sonja, if at all possible. In retrospect, along the way, a number of incidents just happened that made this trip even more enjoyable ... and fruitful.

After the 2001 Christmas season ended, with days short and the crisp New Mexico air limiting outdoor activities, my mind wandered (as usual) to possible travels this coming year. As I periodically play the many CD slide shows (of our travels) that I create for the family, the thought occurred that perhaps another European trip might be in the offing. With Dolores' mother passing away last September, we had no time or responsibility constraints. Our finances were sound (thanks Steve L.), obligations few, and the world was calling.

Initially I decided that Eastern Europe would be our destination. A complete travelogue ... hitting the major historic cities of Budapest, Vienna, Prague and Krakow. Four cities in four weeks. The plan was hatched and Dolores seemed to like the idea ... considering I would be doing all the planning and work. While progressing through the many travel options, a colleague from Canada advised me that he and his wife are also planning a belated honeymoon to Europe with a two-week detour to L'viv, Ukraine. That set off some ideas of my own. Why not try to see if we could also stop in L'viv at the same time and do some more genealogical research on ancestors whom we have recently discovered, plus try to continue our efforts to restore an old German Colony church in an ancestral village. With options selected, we made the necessary travel arrangements, secured a visa to Ukraine and waited for the end of April. In the meantime, we corresponded with Laurentiu, our Romanian cousin, and invited him and his lady friend to be our guests (at our expense) in Vienna for a few days. Similarly, we invited cousin Sonja to meet us in Prague, Czech Republic, and be our guest (also at our expense) for a few days. All handily accepted and our agenda was set. What a family reunion this would be.

Then along comes a surprise, thanks to the Internet. An individual from Montreal, Canada e-mailed us a query asking if he could gain access to our genealogy site (private pages). This individual, Adam Zembala, somehow, through web-surfing, located the family name of Ochab/Trytek, Dolores's family, on our website and thought that perhaps our Trytek was related to his mother, also a Trytek, who just happened to live in Krakow, Poland. Well, a few e-mail's later and it happened ... Adam's mother was Maria (Trytek) Zembala, Dolores's first cousin. This literally blew our minds. Here we are going to Europe to meet family and Krakow offers a golden opportunity to meet a family member long (somehow) known about but virtually unknown in the true sense. Now this trip will be one to remember. Nearly a family member in every city we will visit. Laurentiu will be our guide in Vienna ... Sonja will offer tips and suggestions on Prague (her age prevents her from doing much walking) ... and Krakow will be discovered through Maria's daughter, Iwona, who volunteered to take us under her wing during our extended two-part stay in her city.

Departure was on Monday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> at 7AM. An ungodly hour, considering Las Cruces is 50 miles from the airport and required check-in is 2 hours beforehand. No option, have to stay in El Paso the night before. Left Sunday afternoon, slept well at the Embassy Suites, a no-nothing supper at Denny's next door and off to the airport at 5AM. Uneventful check-in ... airport security spent 15 minutes sniffing all of my camera gear. Welcome to the wonderful world of flying. Next stop – Dallas. Finally landed at O'Hare in Chicago where the line at the LOT (Polish) Airline was a frenzy of returning Poles checking in baggage that more closely resembled cargo-tainers than luggage. Who said there is a weight limit (more on this in Krakow)? It was not uncommon to see someone check-in six HUGE canvas bags whose zippers strained at the seams. Anyway, check-in was fast, wait for boarding was brief and we were off to Poland at 5:30PM. We landed at Warsaw 9:45AM the next day (9½ hours later). I must say the Poles start the day off right. Before landing at Warsaw, duty-free shopping was in full swing and most of the passengers were buying. One fellow in front bought Jim Beam (whiskey) and a large 7-Up. Although not allowed, he opened the bottle and proceeded to pour highballs for himself and his seatmate. They nearly finished the bottle before we landed. It was 8AM. Breakfast in Poland. Warsaw airport is tiny by US standards and we had an 8-hour layover before departing for Vienna. Passport control is a virtual breeze. A free meal voucher provided by LOT was OK ... but the wait was boring. A catholic priest from Poznan (left) corralled us while we tried to rest and look nonchalant. He proceeded to entertain us with his worldwide travels and his meeting with the man himself – John Paul II. A jovial man, amiable and articulate, he showered us with holy cards. He asked that we correspond with him and we agreed. What do you write to a man who is a total stranger and you will never see again? We'll try.



Finally at 6PM we board the plane for the short hop to Vienna. Flight is half-full, mostly Poles and Germans. Free cocktails means that all are drinking. Land at 7:30PM ... still light outside. Austrian passport control is friendly and after retrieving our bags head out to hail a cab. Welcome to Vienna, taxi from airport, which is fairly close, to hotel is \$35. Bad sign, things are expensive here. We find our hotel, check-in and find our room, which is adequate and well furnished. WOW ... a fully stocked mini-bar. Surprise ... they keep track of what's inside and you are charged for every bottle. We keep it closed during our stay. By now it's 9:30PM, too late to try to find a place to eat in a strange city, since you have no clue of what's where. We decided to just walk the nearby City Center and get a sense of what it has to offer. Leaving our hotel (Opernring) we walk a block to the Staatsoper (State Opera), turn left and are confronted by a sea of people walking down the Kartner Strasse. This main thoroughfare leads to Stephansdom, the soul of the city. This church, with its tiled roof, has stood here for over 800 years. Young and old, dressed in finery or grunge, are everywhere. Shops line both sides of this promenade. Food vendors, musicians and peddlers ply their trade while this mass of people casually stroll the cobble-stoned street (closed to autos). Being a Tuesday night it was unusual for us to see such a gathering so late at night. I suppose this is an Austrian way of spending an evening out. For 1½ hour we take in the sights and sounds, walking up and down the many main and side streets, enjoying this variety. But then, time and distance finally caught up with us; the bed at Opernring beckoned. Crashed at near midnight, knowing that tomorrow would bring a visitor and new experiences.





Morning arrived but we were still tired. Woke up kind of late and a guest was arriving at 9AM. Skipped the hotel's breakfast, ran to the nearest bank to exchange US dollars for Euros ("funny money"), hailed a cab and arrived at West Bahnhof (train station) just as the train from Bucharest pulled in. There was our man, Laurentiu (left) ... but alone. Well wishes and hugs were exchanged and we were told that Nadia could not find a substitute teacher and had to remain in Brasov (Romania). Disappointed, we had to make the best of this situation; we were pleased that Laurentiu could take the time off from his University position and spend a few days with us. Now we had a guide and a family member to introduce us to Vienna. First order of business, get Laurentiu checked in into his hostel. We took a bus from the depot to the outskirts of Vienna and located his hostel. High on a hill overlooking Vienna, it was a good choice. We paid for his three-night stay, checked his baggage and headed for Vienna proper. First the bus back to the depot and then we headed for the "underground" (the subway system). These Viennese sure know how to do things. The underground is an engineering marvel. Clean and orderly and with enough signage that anyone who could understand pictorial instructions will not get confused or lost. We purchased an all-day ticket and headed for City Center. Train was fast and we switched to another line and exited at Stephanplatz, where we walked the night before. Our exploration has begun.

Our first full day we spent walking ... just walking. Vienna is divided into "quarters". Stephansdom Quarter is "Old Vienna", which houses many governmental offices, businesses, taverns and stylish shops. The skyline here is dominated by Stephansdom, the cathedral that took centuries to complete (previous page). It is the focus of the city's geographical center. Other than having an evening meal here we spend little time here, simply exploring the cathedral inside and out. We move on to the Hofburg Quarter, which began as a modest fortress that has grown over the centuries into a vast palace. The palace was still expanding until a few years before the Habsburgs fell from power in 1918. The presence of the court had a profound effect on the surrounding area. The former gardens of the palace are now the Volksgarten and Burggarten, and some of the buildings are now splendid museums (right). Streets such as Herrengasse and Bankgasse are lined with the palaces that the nobility built in their eagerness to be as close as possible to the center of imperial power. This area is bustling with tourist by day, but at night it is almost deserted. This tour takes the better part of the day (see our slide show CD).



It is late afternoon and Laurentiu suggests that we visit the Schonbrunn Palace. We take the underground to the outskirts of Vienna and disembark in an area that looks no more showcase than any old section of Vienna. But as we round a corner and enter the promenade that leads to the Schonbrunn Palace and Gardens we are mesmerized. What a splendid sight. Schonbrunn Palace (left) is the former summer residence of the imperial family. It takes its name from a beautiful spring that was found on this site. An earlier hunting lodge was destroyed by the Turks, so Leopold I asked Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach to design a grand Baroque residence



here in 1695. However, it was not until Maria Theresa employed Nikolaus Pacassi that the project was completed in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. The strict symmetry of the architecture is complemented by the gardens with fountains and statues framed by trees and alleyways. We walk around the Palace, admiring its architectural details. The gardens in early spring are devoid of the grand palettes of color but there is enough new growth to make us appreciate their grandeur. We view the Gloriette (right - top), a Neo-Classical arcade at the far end of the vast courtyard. Built in 1775, nearly destroyed in WWII, it is the crowning glory of the hill behind the palace. We walk towards it; along the way encounter the impressive Neptune Fountain, sculpted in 1780 by Franz Zauner. Taking our time to absorb the grandeur, we wind our way to the top of the hill and stand before the Gloriette. Impressive ... but as we turn around to look back at the Palace, our breath is literally taken away. The Palace is immense and majestic, silhouetted against the City of Vienna as the backdrop. We spend a long time here ... the view is serene, humbling and yet impressive. After a while we decide that it is time to leave this magic place. We head down the hill and see a sign for the Schonbrunn Zoo, still on the Palace grounds. Why not, we say. The Schonbrunn Zoo was founded in 1752 at the order of Franz Stephan and is the oldest zoo in Europe. Tickets are purchased; and with the place nearly empty of tourists we weave our way through the many animal exhibits. An enjoyable 1½-hour is spent here. As the evening approaches we elect to leave this place and head back to City Center, vowing to return later to tour the inside of the Palace itself.



Once in the underground Laurentiu recommends that we take it only part way back and instead get off at Mariahilfer Strasse near West Bahnhof. From there we can wind our way back to the Opernring area by foot. The street is a mecca for shoppers. Both sides of the street are packed with locals and tourists alike and with shops carrying every conceivable commodity. We stroll, look and venture into the more interesting ones. We buy CDs and books ... we look for a place to eat. Finally locating a corner eatery with a posted menu that was inviting, we ventured in. Not an open seat in the house. It is only 7:30PM. We elect to wait and eventually a table was available (after the patrons were politely asked to vacate it ... they were sitting there for hours). Wine and beer was ordered followed by a typical Viennese meal of schnitzel. Good is an understatement. One thing that is a negative in Europe ... this is a continent of smokers. What is on the decline in the States is on the upswing in Europe. Nowhere is one safe from second-hand smoke. It's hard to get used to it considering that Las Cruces is a smoke-free CITY! Anyway, after a hearty meal we set off hotel-ward, passing by familiar (by now)

landmarks in the dim light of the evening (above). By the time we reach the State Opera area it is dark. Sensing that Laurentiu is tired from his 23-hour train ride, we say our goodnights, escort him to the underground and walk the brief distance to our hotel. It is 10PM ... it was a good first day. Vienna was a good choice.

[Continued in Section2](#)