

Sept, 1999

Dear Ones,

We are just back from a memorable month in Europe, a gift from Alma's brother Chuck and his wife Christine. While they are still living and working in Slovakia, they encouraged us to come over and visit, and then do some traveling with them. Because KLM Airlines bumped us off of June and onto August, we were able to be with the Martin family at Lisa's wedding near Vienna, Austria. That was just a drive away from Banska Bystrica, Slovakia, where Chuck & Chris live. After that we chose to travel for 10 days in France, where we had recently found our childhood friend, Charles Harper, who has retired there. At the end of the month, the two of us and Chuck had a wonderful week with friends in Northern Ireland, the land of our ancestors. This narrative will include just a few of the highlights, of course.

Our story begins with SLOVAKIA. What a beautiful country, with friendly welcoming people, vast mountain and valley landscapes, and cobblestoned rock-building towns with so much history! In Banska Stiavnica we were attracted to an old, old village church by the sound of the organ. Before we left we had a friend in the young guide, Lucia, who could tell us in English about the church art work, and Alan had been invited to play the organ. Hearing him play Bach, while I sat in the centuries-old pew, meant a lot to me. That day we visited a castle, restored as a museum; very good photo and information displays as well as artifacts from the past. We finished that day having tea in a garden restaurant beside a beautiful lake high up in the mountains.

What Slovakia mostly meant to us was PEOPLE. Chuck and Chris made us a part of their circle of friends in so many contexts - Slovakian co-workers, missionary and Peace Corps friends, church family, Rotary companions and Gypsy ministry leaders. We led the evening service in the church, all translated into Slovak. The people were really interested in ministries in Brazil. Alan also used the borrowed accordion to lead singing in a Bible Club with the Gypsy children. A family of parents and teenage children give full-time in "being there" for the ramshakled apartment building full of gypsies who don't have very many housing or educational options. Chuck works with them, encouraging and looking for funding for the ministry. Alan gave a medical consult or two on the side.

Up in the mountains we visited a family in their very old mountain cottage made of stone and wood. The father is a very successful Christian businessman. An elderly grandmother lives with them. She has two married daughters. One of the couples immigrated to Miami many years ago, and has never been back. Just this Summer, the whole family went to see them in Miami, and included Disney World in their visit. They had such fun telling us - in English and Slovak - all about their adventures. We had a grand time in their simple home on the edge of numerous ski lifts. These are a given in the landscape, not manicured and surrounded by wealth, but just a part of the cultural heritage. Chuck handles Slovak very well, able to translate for us in all our encounters. Chris was at work most of our time in the country, getting ready to travel with us to France. That day we were headed to see the Tatras Mountains, but we met so many friends along the way, that we ended up turning back home at dusk, after a very happy day. We can see the Tatras in most any guidebook anyway.

August 11, 1999. We will always remember our noon mountaintop picnic during the eclipse. With English, Slovakian and American friends we drove up a mountain near Banska Bystrica, set out blankets to sit on, and shared tasty lunch complete with champagne which was opened at the height of the eclipse. There we watched the moon gobble 95% of the sun, producing an eerie half-light and a drop of 10 degrees in the temperature. Alan had prepared strips of x-ray film (Chris' wrist, actually) for us to look through, protecting our eyes. We were all amazed at the half moon we could see in pools of water, and filtered through the shade and light produced by the leaves on a tree. Beata, a good friend of Chuck's, kept saying that all the animals and birds would be quiet during the eclipse, and there was a deep silence.

That is a taste of Slovakia. Chuck & Chris, we will always be grateful to you for providing and encouraging us to come and see you. Thanks!

#### AUSTRIA.

Our participation in Lisa Martin's wedding to Werner Schobesberger on August 14th near Vienna was the central event of the month. On the eve of the wedding, after family and close friends had finished dinner, we sang a few songs in several languages, and then "a palavra foi franqueada" [a chance for anyone to speak.] Each one spoke in her/his native tongue - German, English, Portuguese, Slovak. Ani asked for someone to translate French, and since no one offered, Alan did. And he did an excellent job. Prayers were offered in many languages too, as well as Bible readings at the wedding the next day. Werner is a tall, good-looking Austrian, who was a great host, making everyone feel welcome and chatting quite easily in either English or German. He and Lisa have done ministry together, and will continue this from his furniture shop in Innsbruck. At the wedding, Lisa looked really lovely in a white sheath ankle-length dress, with an added panel in the back that resembled a train, but allowed her to move about easily. Her hair was fixed in soft ringlets, which she thought too fancy, but which suited her face so very well. She sang a number with the other three women of her singing group, and a duet in Portuguese with Sara - "Habita Em Mim" - so beautifully done. The upbeat service, led by an excellent Praise team, was held in a large Evangelical church. The preacher was her pastor when she worked in England. Three young Slovak women, au pairs in London who came to know Christ through Lisa's ministry, were at the wedding. Amazingly, they are part of Chuck's church in Banska Bystrica, and we couldn't believe we were all going to the same wedding! All the wedding service and reception party was translated either to German, or English, depending upon the speaker.

The bridal car, with a large arrangement of fresh flowers attached to the hood, pulled up at the church door when the ceremony finished. The best man drove the newlyweds to the reception in a town 20 miles away. The rest of the congregation fell in line, about 40 cars following with horns blaring and much waving and smiles from those who saw us go by. The sit-down-dinner was in a club surrounded by vast, beautiful gardens, where many pictures were taken. After dinner there were poems and speeches, songs and skits. We had a chance to get in a good visit with Lisa's sister, Sara. It was lovely to see all of Joe & Helen's family there, plus Helen's two brothers. That is real family solidarity.

The next chapter of the Europe story is FRANCE. Chris was so excited over going to her favorite country. Our plan was to rent a car at Marseilles airport, and wander in Southern France from August 16 to 20, when we were due at Charles Harper's in St. Hilaire d'Ozilhan, a village near Avignon. Since we thought we would begin with the beach, we headed toward Fréjus. There, the Tourist Information Bureau informed us that in all of the Cote d'Azur shore line, there was not one hotel room to be had during all the month of August. They said that all the French were on vacation, and besides, they had been invaded by Italians, Swiss, Germans, British, and Greeks. We had gotten up at 4 AM in Vienna and were very tired, the day was extremely hot, and evening was coming. The young man that was helping us said with a smile, "Why don't you go home and come another time, out of high season?" Chris is an amazingly resourceful lady. With her ideas and Alan's French, they got on the phone and found 2 rooms in a hotel in the mountains, about an hour away, in Draguignan. We didn't know at the time, but August 16 is a great festival day in Draguignan, when they celebrate the Americans liberating their town in 1945. When we walked out of the hotel going to supper, there was a rock band set up in the park in front, sounding just like Mongaguá! Later there were fireworks, and the next day we visited the beautiful American cemetery where over 1000 soldiers are buried. I wished their families could have seen it through my eyes, and felt the joy of that town in what those Americans had done so long ago.

In the next couple of days Chuck and Chris went exploring in the mountains, and came back having found a tiny medieval village with an "Auberge Les Arcades" where they reserved rooms for us. Stone walls, flowering vines, a patio, just outside our windows, where delicious food was served by candlelight. The French do know how to weave romance and awe into daily life. We visited a centuries-old "padaria" [bakery] with an enormous wood-burning stone oven in the wall; watched an artist painting; listened to the church bells; and sat at one of the cafés on the central square.

We thought of you often, Sylvia, as we looked at very old buildings or ruins. We were in the foothills of the Alps in the mountain town of Bargème in Southern France, a pile of rock buildings, church and castle built over a thousand years ago. It is being restored bit by bit, as so much of Europe is, and maybe always is. From the walls we could see miles and miles across the wooded hills and valleys dotted with farms and villages. Alan said he was sure that a watchman could have seen any enemy three days away. We all agreed that today's enemies, like bombs, beguiling twisted beliefs or disease, come in more stealthily. As I looked at this and other places, I wondered if you, Sylvia, could have told me the different dates of construction.

On the 20th we arrived at Chuck Harper's. He is a Brazil MK, a friend from childhood days, who we had not seen for 45 years. He has worked in Geneva for most of his missionary life, and now lives alone in an old house in this little village - 700 people - where he has many friends. The five of us had a wonderful time together, exploring old Roman ruins, the Avignon Pope's castle, the Uzés Saturday fair, and going to his French Reformed church on Sunday, complete with communion. Delicious French food was a part of it all, including beautifully prepared and candlelit served dinners by our host. He invited Jean & Nicole Fischer, neighbors and Geneva friends as well, to Sunday evening dinner. Meeting interesting people was certainly a highlight of our month.

Our 10 days in France flew by and Chris flew home to work, and the three of us flew to Belfast.

NORTHERN IRELAND - That day we were in 5 airports in five countries - Marseilles, Brussels, Vienna, Amsterdam and Belfast, by 9PM. We could not get 3 tickets together, so in Vienna, Chuck flew to Gatwick in London, transferred to Heathrow, and flew to Belfast, arriving 10 minutes after our plane! Europe is unique! Alma had a bad cough and her ears really hurt on all those ups and downs. At the airport emergency health center in Vienna we found a doctor who was very helpful providing medicine. Being in Bill & Ruth Addley's home in Conlig, Northern Ireland, half an hour from the airport, was so very restful. They were Irish Presbyterian friends from Brazil, the kind one never forgets. Of their three daughters, Judith lives home right now, teaching math in a near-by girl's school. Dr. Ruth took some vacation, and Dr. Bill was on vacation until Sept. 1 when his professorship at the Seminary began. We roamed the countryside, seeing lochs, beautiful ocean scenes, green hills and valleys. We went to the O'Dochartaigh Association on Inch Island, County Donegal, just beyond Londonderry, crossing into the Republic of Ireland in peace. There, Chuck found his friend Pat Dougherty, who he had met on his visit 10 years ago. Pat was an enthusiastic host, telling us that his computer now has over 2 million Daugherty-family names in its records! Since so many men's names are repeated, he searches with a woman's name. Carrie Daffin had our family on the screen in less than a minute! We got some printouts of our family, if any of you are interested. On the way to Inch Island, we stopped in for coffee and scones with Margaret, a dear friend of the Addleys. What a privilege to be able to visit friends of friends. Sunday, Ruth's two brothers, with a wife and little girl, came to dinner. We had a lovely visit.

Second to the fun of seeing friends, our heart wish for Europe was to hear live classical music. We started looking for concerts in Slovakia, and found that the musical season ended with July, and started again in November. We had a Sunday in Vienna after Lisa's wedding, and we ran to the big cathedral where mass is often accompanied by orchestra and chorus. That Sunday there was no extra music, and we ended up sitting in St. Stephen's, a few blocks away, and listening to Bach being played on the organ at the end of the service. A couple thousand people listened with us. In France we saw concerts advertised for just before or just after our visits to each town. That left Ireland, and our expectations were lavishly met. One of the evenings we all went to the Ulster Hall in Belfast to a BBC Summer Invitation Concert by the Ulster Orchestra. There, we heard Sullivan, Fini, John Taverner and Elgar. That concert was recorded, and BBC will be broadcasting it some time in the future. Maybe we will even hear it again.

In Philadelphia, the Carahers were our "book ends!" They took us to the airport on August 3, and picked us up on September 2. The overnights, meals, rest and fellowship with them made our trip complete. How grateful we are to each one who helped us along the way. Our lives have been enriched, and we have much to ponder in our hearts.

Bless you all.

Lovingly,

Alma and Alan