CHAPTER IX

TAWERN: HOME OF THE RIPPS

by
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This is the ancestral home of Johann Peter Ripp. (1988)
It is located at 228 Spanische Ecke Tawern, West Germany

Today Spanische Ecke 5, Tawern (2025)

The driver pulled his battered taxi to a sudden stop. Jürgen, daughter Sharon and I lurched against the front seat, bumping our knees against the worn upholstery.
"What's the matter?" Jürgen asked, alarmed. "Nothing – I just liked to show you this," he answered, as he pointed to a ripening field of amber—colored wheat to our right.

"Why?" I asked, annoyed with the driver for giving us such a fright and wanting to know why. Undeterred by my tone Julian continued, still pointing.

"You see where that wheat's growing? well, right there we shot down an American plane during the war and killed six soldiers," he chuckled.
None of us responded as he started his taxi. Not seventeen-year old German cousin Jurgen. not sixteen-year-old Sharon. Nor I. What was there to say to such vindictiveness, I thought as we rode silently the rest of the five miles to Weinbergstraße in Tawern where we would meet our Ripp relatives who were expecting us. Jürgen's mother Grete (who too was a Ripp) had told these folks on the occasion of Josef 's and Maria's fiftieth wedding anniversary about the impending visit of the two American cousins. They in turn had extended the invitation. Jürgen would go along and pave the way. He had telephoned the taxi driver upon our arrival by train at Kruez-Konz (five miles from Tawern) to pick us up and take us to the Ripp homestead.
We had just gotten off from a five-hour wonder and memory-packed train ride from Duisburg, Germany, where we 'd spent five unforgettable days with Jurgen and his parents, (Heinrich and Grete Diepenbruck) to whom we'd said a tearful "Auf Wiedersehen" that morning - who we'd met only through the mails before our visit.

After we'd boarded the train, settled ourselves in a car with the typical cabin—type seats and large windows affording a view of all we passed, I relived and internalized those five wonderful days with the Diepenbrucks. Days, when they gave us so much of themselves—-so much insight into their way of life, thinking, and attitudes, both inside their hone and out of it.
As we moved on through the heavy industrial area of Düsseldorf, where smoke belched from iron works chimneys, we made a short station—stop at Köln (Cologne) which is situated in the form of a half-circle on the left bank of the Rhine river. I recalled Grete saying one day," We must take you to Koln to see the city and visit the wonderful Kölner Dom (Cathedral) while you are here. They started building it way back in the 1200's and finally finished it in the late l800s. It's the biggest Dom in Germany, and die spitzer go up five hundred feet !"
" That sounds wonderful, we'd like that," I'd answered, wondering what there was to it besides antiquity and size.

Grete seemed to have read my mind, "There's something there you can't see any place else in the world - the tomb with the bodies of the three kings in it. "0oh?", Sharon and I looked at each other, unbelieving – but -willing to be shown.

The following day Grete, Jürgen, Sharon and I had taken the train to Köln, where we had gotten off at the station which is near the Gothic Cathedral with its lacy-stone-five-hundred-foot spires dominating the view in Köln. A short walk in the warm June air, and we'd come to the magnificent structure with its massive pillars, that rise to a high-vaulted ceiling

looking down on intricate cut-out figures of the twelve apostles, saints and statuary. And tombs of royalty with their full-length, stretched-out, carved images on the cover.

We'd stood and gazed at the pictorial colorful blues, greens, and magenta stained glass (typical of the medieval era) interspersed with plain glass. " Why do they have plain glass in some of the windows?" I asked.
" Why, that's where the bombs fell," Grete answered, surprised at my question. There were fourteen of then, great big heavy ones. Besides, they destroyed thirteen of these beautiful arches," she made a sweeping gesture with her arm. We'd gone on wordlessly to walk on tie mosaic floors around the high altar with its magnificent altar piece (file adoration of the Magi), and wide halls. I remembered then, that our beloved late President Kennedy who'd been assassinated the year before had walked here too. When I voiced this to Grete she said, "I know, we were also very sad. The women cried in the streets when we learned he was killed. I think he had as many friends here as at home. Doesn't he?"
I nodded yes in agreement as we walked toward the high altar with its glittering, carved tomb of the remains of the Magi (or three kings). "They're not really here, it's symbolic, isn't it?" I said, questionally.
"No, no," Grete answered, "They were brought here many years ago." In as much as she was unable to say how, or by whom, I didn't persue the point.

She did go on to explain about a pilgrimage held in the form of a procession on January sixth in honor of the three kings who'd followed the star in the East and brought gifts to the infant Jesus so many years ago. This I knew, and could understand from the religious and secular view...

How well I remembered, when Matt and his Schafkopf-card-playing relatives and friends gave special points between Christmas and January sixth for holding three of the four kings in the deck. And the friendly arguments that ensued.

As the train had moved along past sugar beet and truck farming toward Koblenz, (where the Moselle River joins the Rhine) and we passed gracefully terraced vineyards, went through a long, dark tunnel with a blue light in the low ceiling, I reminisced further about those five much-planned-for days and how it all came about. Reminisced, that is, between the butter-bread sandwiches Grete had packed for us, coke and coffee we 'd purchased from the vendor who pushed his cart down the isle, stopping at each cabin. I smiled inwardly as I unwrapped a ham and cheese sandwich and remembered the first time I'd heard Grete refer to butter-bread. I'd wondered, who 'd want plain bread and butter - which is what it implied in my German-American background.

With my thoughts momentarily on American soil I recalled how excited I 'd been when we planned this trip, at finding the village of Tawern on an up-to-date map, only six miles from the Luxembourg border. What an odd coincidence, I'd thought there was a town called Luxemburg, where a Germanic dialect referred to as "Luxemburgisch-Deutsch" was spoken -just six miles from my home village of New Franken, Wisconsin.

While I'd learned about Burkart and other genealogical origins from my aunt Annie (Matt 's sister), it was uncle Kilian Ripp (Lizzie's brother) who had given me the lead about the Ripps and von Hattens in Germany and Alsace -Lorraine. He, who'd indulged my curiosity, volunteering information each time I'd returned to New Franken for a visit; who had given me the Diepenbruck address and told me his son Ervin had spent four days with them when he was stationed in Germany at the time of the Korean war. It was from Kilian I'd learned about the Ripps in Tawern - the three brothers who had built homes next to each other on Weinbergstrasse. Learned his brother Conrad (the priest) had spent his vacations with them when he was a student at Innsbruck, Austria for five years; that he considered Tawern his home away from home.

With this orientation I had written to Grete, whose mother Süss was a Ripp, granddaughter of Johann Peter who'd retained in Tawern when his brother Nickolas (my great-grandfather), emigrated to New York State around 1853.

Our cousinship established through mutual great-great-grandparents Nickolaus Ripp and Maria Steir Ripp (dating back to the seventeen hundreds), we had been invited to the Diepenbruck three-room and-bath flat near the Rhine. And welcomed wholeheartedly.

A wave of pleasure swept over me as the train rumbled along, with Jurgen and Sharon absorbed in each other, and I lost in my reminiscing. I recalled our first encounter with the Diepenbrucks. Sharon and I had come by train from Brussels, Belgium, filled with anticipation and a little apprehension.
Would someone be there? Would they like us? Our fears were allayed somewhat with blond, blue-eyed, slender Jurgen meeting us and taking us by taxi to seven-mile-away Duisberg-Beeck, to Fontanestraße l0, where we'd met Heinrich. Fiftyish, balding, Heinrich.

He’d extended his hand and said," Welcome, please ome in." And we entered the Diepenbruck home with its sunny living room, ‘lace-curtained’ windows, plant-bedecked sills, and low table elegantly set for "Kuchen und Kaffee trinken".
Grete had greeted us shyly, but warmly. One of the first things the blond, hazel—eyed, fortyish Grete said (obviously relieved) in her impeccable German was, "I’m so glad you speak German I was wondering how we could talk together."

That evening Anneliese, Grete's first cousin (my fourth) came to meet the American cousins. I felt sad and a little guilty when she said, " My father was killed at Mühlheim, that's near Duisburg, just two hours before the Americans came and the war was over. He was already fifty-four years old..."

Later that evening we looked at pictures, compared genetic traits and agreed, much to everyone's surprise, that geographical location makes no difference with genes.

I had been somewhat apprehensive about my relationship with Heinrich because of his having served in the German army for ten years, and while I was eager to learn about attitudes and involvement, I felt it inappropriate to bring up the subject.
I needn't have worried. Heinrich wanted to talk incessantly, while Grete would shake her head

negatively, a disturbed expression on her face, and say, "Enough! I don't want to remember it!"

There were, however, some things she was willing to remember, things that dealt with family during, and after the war. Even a little about the Jewish situation. One day, as the subject turned to what had happened to the Jews, she raised her hand and swore, "Liebe Gott, we didn't know what was happening. There wasn't anything in the newspapers. And if we did know, what could we do...? Do you understand? "
" Yes I got it," I'd answered her plea for understanding, more in empathy than in belief. Could anyone really understand?
Another time, when we'd gone grocery shopping to one market for meat, another for vegetables, we stopped at a novelty store for postcards. I'd picked up one of the Buchenwald concentration camp. Grete reached to snatch it from me, "Do not send, it's not nice!".
When I assured her I wasn't planning to send it, but only wanted it for my file, she seemed satisfied. As I observed healthy, handsome Jürgen talking animatedly with Sharon in his limited school English, with our train stopping at every little hamlet, it was hard to internalize that hunger was so rampant in post war Germany that when he was born he'd suffered from malnutrition and weighed only four pounds.

" Dear god," Grete had said, her eyes clouding, " he was so little, and nothing much to eat...everybody went hungry."
"Didn't anybody help?" I'd asked.
" Yes, some. uncle Kilian sent big round chunks of cheese from his farm in Wisconsin, sugar, and flour. And a few clothes. Mary Staegbauer, Pater Conrad Ripp's housekeeper, she sent food packages too. Just like he did after the first war, when he was still living. It helped but couldn't be enough."

I was saddened by my German cousins' plight, but at the same time proud of the American relatives for their concern. One afternoon, after Heinrich's two-hour break from his office job in the coal yards, and he had come home for Mittag-Essen, my curiosity got the better of me and I asked, " Heinrich, please, tell me, did you belong to the Hitler Youth?"
" No, no, my mother wouldn't let me," he'd answered, a touch of pride in his voice. " she was Lutheran and very religious. I admit, at the time I really wanted to belong."
"Your mother knew best. But I can understand you wanted to be like the other boys...and you say she was Lutheran – but Jurgen - he's Catholic, and Grete too? "
"Yes, that's how it is in Germany, whatever the mother is the kids will be. Most families have only one or two though."

At my surprised look and barely audible "Hmm" Heinrich went on," Oh yes , it's different than in your country. Birth control is no sin since the war. We don 't have enough " Lebensraum" (living space) - that's what we fought about and we lost seven million men trying to get it... oh my god – that was terrible" he sighed, got up and went into the bed room and came back with a framed photo he 'd taken off the wall. Pointing at the figures, he said, "My parents, me, and my brother." I'd met the parents but not the brother. "Where is he?" I asked.

"Dead, he was killed in Russia. He was only twenty years old.“ And Heinrich went back to the bedroom and returned the picture to its place on the wall.

My reminiscing ended (for the time being) with our silent taxi ride that would bring us to Weinbergstrasse 2, in Tawern. As Julian drove through the hilly countryside with vineyards on both sides of us, Tawern came into view and my excitement knew no bounds. I would walk on the home ground of my forebears whose blood had mingled with that of the Burkarts, Schotts, Langs, Baumanns, Muellers, Haubrights, et al., to create me! And I said as much to Jurgen and Sharon, who smilingly indulged me with, “Yes, aunt, yes mother," while Julian made his way down a narrow, roughly paved street which appeared to be an alley. We were soon to learn otherwise when he stopped in front of a newly-built stucco house with a wood loft, grape - processing shed and barn attached. Along with a sizable manure pile, also fronting toward the street, which really surprised me.

At the sound of the taxi pulling up, a rather plump, fortyish, high-cheek-boned woman came out of the barn. Her rosy coloring deepened and bright blue eyes lit up with recognition as Jurgen stepped out of the taxi, with Sharon and me following.

This was cousin Katie who I'd been so anxious to meet. She self-consciously wiped her hands on her blue-grey print apron, then extended her right hand and said, "Welcome, we are glad you are here. Come right in - you must be tired."

After nodding recognition and saying "Tag" to Julian, (the customary greeting for ‘good day’), she gestured for us to follow her into the house, where she immediately removed the small bandana-like scarf that partially covered her bun-drawn blond hair. Still following, we dragged our suitcases to the end of a long hall before we entered a large, sunny kitchen. Awaiting us here were Katie's parents Josef and Maria, called Opa and Oma (Germanic for Grandpa and Grandma as I learned later), Katie's daughters, thirteen-year-old Hildegardt, and twenty-three-year-old Mathilde - all looking at us expectantly as Katie said, "They are here – the people from America!“

After reserved, sincere "Welcome, and hello" and warm handshakes all around, Hildegardt and Jurgen carried our luggage up the marble-covered stairway to the room we would share for the next four days. The roan with a king-size bed, a near foot-deep down tick and huge square feather pillows. Just like at the Diepenbrucks. And just like at the Diepenbrucks, a floor to Ceiling clothes cabinet, almost the length of one wall. Apparently they don't have built-in closets here either, even in the new hones, I'd said to myself. Delighted with the space and comfortable bed allotted, we were especially grateful to Katie's daughters for giving up their room to us.

Just as the Diepenbruck cousins had done. While Katie had been feeding and caring for their two cows (that never leave their stalls) and two hogs, Hildegard had set the table in the corner of the large kitchen for five o'clock "Kaffee trinken", resplendent with peach and apricot tortes topped with whipped cream. The fruit, which came from the Ripp-Schons garden was only the beginning of treats tint garden would give us. A lush garden - enriched by the manure pile – filled with cherries, currents, strawberries, huckle berries, apples, pears

and plums. Not to mention kohlrabi, kale, long wide pole beans, and less exotic "Gemüse" such as carrots, cucumbers and potatoes. All grown on a relatively small, deep-b1ack-soil plat of land, the end of which led to the near quarter mile slope to the top of the “Berg“ - the slope on which the Ripp-Schons family grew, and ultimately processed, green grapes for the well-known Moselle white wine.

After " Kaffeetrinken", and a toast to our newly—found relationship with some of that wine, Mathilde, who had come home earlier from her secretarial job in Trier said, " I'll set the table while you go up to the "Berg". There you'll get a wonderful view of Tawern before dark. But bitte, be back by eight for Abend Essen." By then, her father Peter who worked late would be home from his railroad job, she added, and also her fiance, Josef Strack, would come too. He spoke English, and that would make it easier to communicate.
That would be nice, we all agreed, including Oma, who with a smile on her round, smooth-skinned seventy-plus-year-old face said, "I come with you," as Hildegardt, Katie, Jürgen, Sharon and I prepared for the trek up the "Berg", from where we would see most of Tawern.

The spectacular and unforgettable view, with mountains on all four sides of the little village nestled in the valley, and the red-gold sun setting behind the mountains made the rather ardous trek truly worthwhile. Oma, scarcely winded, pointed out the mountains and named then: Ruohler to the west, Orchenberg to the north, Metzenberg to the south and Pflauberg to the east. And, just on the other side - Luxembourg.

She continued to enlighten us as she pointed out a church steeple, “See that "Spitz" down there near the middle of town? Well, that's what's left of the old Saint Peter 's church where your uncle, Pater Ripp, made his Primitz in l902."
"What's a Primitz? " I asked, at which time Katie picked up from her mother, " It's when an ordained priest says his first mass on his home land. And that's how Pater Conrad felt about our village. It was his home away from home - righ mother?"
"Yes correct, Katie. Anyway, that's what your Oma and Opa always said."

On our way down from the Berg Oma reminisced aloud about the seminarian cousin Conrad - how he spent his vacations from his studies at Innsbruck with the Ripps - how he would laugh and kibitz with his cousin Suss (who later became Grete's mother) and other local young folks.
She'd lived in two-mile away Fellerich and had been invited to the big Primitz party her future husband Josef ‘s parents gave for the newly ordained priest, she went on, remembering, " I was sixteen then, with a nice new dress and a real tight waist, and a pretty hat with a big feather - yes, it was wonderful!"

When we returned to the house Mathilde had the table set for evening dinner, Peter was waiting to greet us, and Opa was relaxing with his pipe and book on his couch, along one kitchen wall. Eighty years old, hard-of-hearing Opa. He sat up a little straighter and looked directly at Oma as we came through the door. "Well? where did you go that you had to be away so 1ong?" Oma cocked her head slightly as she answered, " Not far, only up the Berg. I pointed out Tawern, the "Spitz, und der Berge Ruohler, Orchenberg, Metzenberg, und Pflauberg."

The disbelief in Opa's pale blue eyes emphasized the disbelief in his voice, "How could you know those names?" Oma's almost sky-blue eyes twinkled, and a little smile crept around the corners of her mouth as she answered, "I know – I know" giving the "ch" the "sh" sound of Southern Germany Platt-Deutsch.

The unspoken exchange as their eyes met spoke louder than the words. That she should know was beyond Opa's understanding, that was only for 11-en to know. Obviously her knowing wasn't in keeping with the "cooking, church and childred" philosophy of the old-world German Hausfrau's role, I said to myself.

After our evening dinner, comprised of open-face sandwiches with home smoked ham, sliced tomatoes and cheese cake, Opa took a jigger of his home-made "Apfelschnaps", drank it slowly and retired for the night. The rest of us (including Oma) drank another bottle of wine and continued becoming acquainted through talk about our respective families and homes, their names, what they did, where they lived. Everything light…

Opa was up bright and early the following day. Since Katie had told me his mind was sharpest after his morning jigger of Apfel Schnapps and breakfast, and I was eager to learn what I could about the family genealogy, I seated myself near him on his couch with my ever—-present notebook in hand.

Sharon and Jurgen had gone, hand in hand, for a walk in the village and the gardens. The togetherness they 'd shared in Duisberg, and on the train, had blossomed into romance. She,
intrigued with his handsome blondness, he, with her dark-eyed, black-haired beauty. Each, with the foreigness' of the other.

Now, with Katie and Oma occupied with domestic tasks, I decided would be a good time to pick Opa's brains. Yes, he'd be happy to answer any questions I had, if he could. "Then, please, will you tell me what you know about why my great-grandfather Nickolas, left for America when your grandfather, Johann Peter stayed in Tawern? And anything else you remember," I added with a smile.

He put his fingers to the side of his rather large nose, and thumb under his chin as he collected his thoughts, "Well, they had this land in the old days, right here where three Ripp families still live. Now, that wasn't much land for a big family and there were five sons - Nickolas was the oldest. He was born about 1802, I think, and my grandfather, that was Johann Peter, was born in 1813. He was the only one of them Ripps that stayed in Tawern." Opa shifted his position on the couch while I waited, impressed with his recollections as he went on, " Anyway, by the time they divided the 1and between the brothers there wasn't enough to make a living. So, they did day work - mostly picking up stones and hauling than to Trier for buildings. You know that's twelve kilometers from here, and it was hard work. Then Nickolas heard you could get land cheap in New York State, so he packed up his wife and two daughters and five sons and was gone." As Opa paused momentarily I interjected, "That's right, he raised his family and is buried there at Mohawk Hill near Boonville, uncle Kilian told me."

"Ooh? I didn't know that...I did hear tell he was sorry he left Germany - that it was a hard life. I understand the main reason they left for America was them five sons and that he didn't want than to go into that Prussian army like he and the other young men had to."

"And what did you do for a living, Opa?" "Worked on the railroad from before Maria and me was married in May, of 1914. Then in August or September -1 had to go in the army as a railroad worker. It was a lotta worry – so much fighting where we had to go through."

Oma looked up from cleaning beans at the kitchen table for lunch, “Yes that was terrible" and she went on to relate that in 1939 their home was occupied by German soldiers and they, as well as all civilians in Tawern, had to leave. They were allowed to take only two suit cases with them. " And what can you take in just two suit cases? Yes - and we couldn't know when we would come back, so we took clothes and a few papers. Pictures we had to leave behind...yes that was bad," she sighed and went on with cleaning the beans.

Little by little, I learned that Oma and youngest son, Willi, went by rail to Mechelburg (now in East Germany). The older children, Katie and her sisters Gretchen and Trine joined them later while Opa and eldest son Josef worked on the railroad- Oma didn't know where her children were for three weeks until they got in touch with her at Mechelburg where they all stayed from Septemper to November. They then went to Tante Süss's place in Duisburg-Beeck where they remained until June.

In May of that year (1940) Katie married Nickolas Schons Peter's older brother in the home of Tante Suss and Grete.

Upon their return to their Weinbergstrasse home, "all was damaged," Oma's eyes saddened at the memory," Our three cows, the chickens, pigs - all gone. The furniture kaput, dirty and
broken dishes in the bathtube. Everything dirty but life went on - you know Mathilde was born here in 1941." She swallowed hard and continued," Nickolas, her father, was in the army in France - and I'll never forget how he came home one day – then - just before time to go back he kissed the baby and went out the door fast. And we never saw him again. He died in Russia in 1942, und buried in Djukino cemetery there.

She got up and brought the beans to the sink to be washed prepared for lunch -
(Eleven years later Katie married Peter, Nicholas's brother and father of Hildegardt. His mother had said to him, "Son, you marry Katie, she needs somebody to take care of her and the baby.")

After four years of rebuilding, the Ripp home was again occupied. This time French and American soldiers came and took over. Opa was working on the railroad in Kirn near Kreuzbach when the family was told they had to leave. This time they were allowed to take furnishings for two rooms - in Kirn.

Upon their return in 1945 they were met with a repeat of the first occupation. "Everythin damaged!" when I asked Oma," How could you go through all that again?" she responded, her chin set firmly, "Yes, you have to, and so you do it - life goes on..."

After lunch she, Katie and I, walked through the village and were greeted with "Tag" by everyone we passed. Such friendly folks, I observed! As we stopped in front of the steeple Oma had pointed out from the Berg, (which is now the 1914 and 1940 Tawern war memorial) Oma called attention to three Ripp names and two Schons - Peter's brothers. "Peter was a prisoner of war but Gott sei dank ' he came home safe, after nine months in the hospital," she sighed, as I murnered, "how sad…"

That evening Katie's brother Josef, nicknaned Jupp, joined us in the Ripp-Schons large living room for Mosel wine and conversation. When I first saw him and heard him speak I was amazed at the strong resemblance he bore to my nephew Fran Burkart, in Wisconsin. The same smile and little twist of his mouth when he talked. How could they have the sane mannerisms they're an ocean apart, I thought and said, after we became better acquainted. Because of this resemblance Jupp has always been especially dear to me.

He too, had been a P.O.W. Eighteen months at Camp LeMans, (south of Paris). "Strange," he said, "how different people are. One American soldier would feel sorry for you and give you a cigarette. Then another would grab it out of your mouth and step on it - You know, I had nothing to say about that war and you didn't either," his tone indicated he held no malace.
Strange too, I thought, how much you can learn over a bottle of wine and identified kinship.

The following day (Sunday) Oma, in her navy-blue suit and plain hat set squarely on top of her snow-white head, and I walked up the hill to Saint Peters church. Sharon and Jurgen followed behind. As we entered the beautiful gothic structure, Oma and I went to the left – the women's side. Jurgen and Sharon, obsorbed in themselves, went to the right - the men's side.
"I wanted to go right through the wall when that old man glared at me. I was so embarrassed!" Sharon said later when we told about it at the house and everybody laughed good-naturedly. The latin high mass we'd attended was augmented by full-rounded German comnunity singing, wherein everyone stood and joined in. And so did I, aided by a friendly woman who shared her book with me. Mixed feelings of pathos and joy had flooded over me at the words, "Give us the gift of peace."

During the interlude, when a youthful acolyte passed a "Koffer" (sort of a closed silver stein with a handle) for the collection my mind had turned to the Ripps in America: Kilian, Tony, Lizzie, Jake, all who sang in the church choir and/or around home and their social gatherings. Gentle, philosophical Kilian; fun-loving, joke-playing Tony; quiet introverted Lizzie, who even in the tragic years of her life sang her songs; handsome, flamboyant Jake, who after he met Tillie Theissen at choir practice broke his engagement to my aunt Annie (Matt 's sister)
and married the dynamic, extroverted Tillie. Settled in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin and had a family of thirteen with eleven growing to adulthood. Two, Ambrose and Ronan having died at the ages of four and two from diphtheria - while their parents held then. Helpless.

At the priest 's announcing the Kermiss they would have the the following Sunday, continuing through Tuesday, my mind turned too, to Matt and the two-ay Belgium Kermisses in Walhain he'd so loved to attend.

On our leisurely walk back to the house I asked, "What is Kermiss here? What will you be doing? "
"Ja, it is a big thing,“ Oma answered, "It is for the name day of St. Margaretta. We make the whole house nice with flowers. Cook and bake a lot for people who come. And we have a big procession from the church to the vhapel of Margaretta - that's at the cemetery, just outside of the village.

The priest has a little ceremony for about a quarter-of-an hour, then we celebrate! Eating, drinking, dancing at night. I wish you could stay for the Kermiss," she said wistfully. I did too. How much it was like the Kenniss in Walhain, I thought, with some people going to ‘The Chapel’ for the religious service.

Just around the bend to Weinbergstrasse we passed an old sandstone house with farm machinery and the ever-present manure pile in front. (Ina pointed to the place and said, "Johann Peter raised his five sons there." I made a quick note of the address: 228 Spanische Ecke 228. When we got back to the house I was surprised to see the whole Ripp-Schons family assembled as well as Peter 's sister and brother-in-law, the Ackermanns from Berlin. They were there for Mittag Essen and visiting. Ackermann mentioned his visit to his eighty-four-year-old mother in the East Zone over Christmas. It was the only time he would be permitted to go he said, adding with a trace of bitterness, "You as Americas can go anytime, but we can't."

After Mittag Essen Jupp took us to 'Trier, the oldest Roman city in Germany—which is a story onto itself. After much sight-seeing, suffice it to say here that the Porta Negra, still standing ancient Roman gate, alone made the visit worthwhile.

At 6:20 we put Jurgen on the train in Trier for his return to Duisburg-Beeck, sending along greetings and love to his parents, Heinrich and Grete. Jupp and I looked aside as Jurgen and Sharon said their Good-Bye - would they ever see each other again? Would any of us ever see each other again? Would Sharon and I ever walk again on the home ground of the Ripps? See their beautiful flowers and smell their fragrance and the pungent oder of their land? Feel the warmth of hospitality and friendship as it manifested itself even more in the following two days?

Days, when Oma, Opa, Katie, Peter, and Josef feted us and explained more of the family history while volunteering further help. And answered my questions with candor. Days,
whel as we becazre better acquainted I asked some ‘hard' questions, and they in turn did likewise. A case in point was when I finally got up the courage to ask Katie, "Tell me, please, did you believe Hitler?" and she, flushing, answered, " Yes, I'm sorry to say I did. He promised so much -and we needed so much, ever since after the first war."

And as I tried to understand my relatives' feelings, they also tried to understand my responses to their questions relating to the treatment of our American Indians and status of our black citizens.

Yes, indeed, you can learna lot over a bottle of wine and shared experiences. Finally, it was time to leave the charming little village of Tawern snuggled in the boson of the four mountains Oma had so ably named. Josef Strack (who too is a story onto himself) took us to Haupt-Konz for our train to Alsace-Lorraine, home of the Langs and van Hattens. With our luggage made heavier by two bottles of wine, one from Katie and the other from Barbara and Richard Mueller (cousins at Weinbergstrasse 3) in place, we'd said Godd-Bye amid expressions of love and appreciation.

Moist eyes had joined our as we'd stood on the front stoop for a last photo. Then, with a backward look and wave of the hand we were on our way...