

News from Nan

NAN'S WRITINGS, TRAVEL

THE JOY OF TRAVEL I

OCTOBER 31, 1995 | NAN

Ellen and Rick's wedding in Hawaii on October 7, 1995, inspired Nan to write about some of the trips she had enjoyed during her lifetime.

On this beautiful October night, a plane should be just arriving at San Francisco Airport. Among the passengers from Hawaii, perhaps wearing the leis that so often scent the whole airport as the passengers disembark from that flight, will be Mr. and Mrs. Richard H. Livengood, our Ellen (nee Johnson) and Rick. Married October 7 in a beautiful Hawaiian ceremony on the island of Kauai, they are arriving home to begin their life together, a new life that we hope will be long and happy for them. Their Hawaiian trip, which included marriage and honeymoon, was shared by their families and many friends.



1995: Kauai, wedding party

Too old, now, to make such long trips, I have nevertheless enjoyed this one. I thank my family most heartily for enabling me to enjoy vicariously the trips they take. With phone calls, cards, letters, and gifts they include me in their journeys, enriching my armchair travels. For more than eighty-eight years I have

been enjoying this “great wide beautiful wonderful world,” as I shall continue to do as long as I’m permitted to stay on it.

Perhaps people who descend from immigrants all have a natural bent for travel: at least, it seems to me that we have all had a special yen to go somewhere — anywhere — and see things. With my parents, with friends, and then with John and Anna, I have traveled quite a goodly share of miles, and yet hardly touched the vast possibilities. But every little sample gives one insight to enjoy other places I will never reach in person.

Before the ocean liners passed into history, I had several trans-Atlantic voyages. Now when I read about storms on the North Atlantic, they are made real by my memory of one such storm we experienced! I can still see the grand piano rolling slowly across the salon floor, then rolling back as the ship roiled in time with the action of the waves. It was frightening but exciting, and the camaraderie of the passengers singing the storm evening away made a scary experience seem quite a warm one.



Hurricane in the North Atlantic

The arrival at Halifax the next morning completed the happy ending. The autumn sunshine was brilliant, and somehow everything seemed unusually bright blue. The air had been blown ice-clean, clear, and cold, for summer was now vanquished and winter’s teeth showed a little in the brisk air.

But ocean travel is not always stormy. More often one remembers the excitement of going aboard, the departure, and the luxurious life aboard, with its wonderful food! There is a fascination in the water itself and in the ship, which clucks to itself in accompaniment to the rhythm of the waves.

I had the pleasure of two trips in Great Lakes steamers, besides shorter runs on the lake or in the rivers, and in smaller boats. When Paul and I were small, my mother and her sister, our Aunt Martha with our cousin Frances, took a boat at Harbor Beach and went to Rogers City. There we visited Aunt Louise before going into the north woods where Aunt Sophie lived, at Lake Brevoort.

Of the boat I remember best the polished pistons in the engine room, because Paul loved machinery best and couldn't get enough of watching it through the window.

Big sister had to take him there so he could see.

Of the visit at Aunt Sophie's I have all-too vivid memories of man-eating mosquitoes, relentless in their assaults on us.

One of our ocean voyages also provided us with add-on rail trips. In Holland it is very handy and much fun to travel by train, and we took advantage. John decided that he wanted more time to visit old friends, so he bought Anna and me tickets with an escorted tour from Amsterdam to Denmark. We were "adopted" by a kind Dutch couple, who helped us with the language and unfamiliar customs. They even managed to get water for us to drink! (Europeans don't always understand thirst as we do. The waiter would bring wine, beer, etc., but a glass of plain drinking water was hard to get.)

As the train went north, we looked at each station where we stopped, and said its name. A long way up the line from Amsterdam we pulled in at a station that we ascertained to be Buxtehude.

Buxtehude! That rang a bell in my memory from away back! Mother used to say when the knife she was using was very dull: "Well, you could ride from Amsterdam to Buxtehude on this one!" And we had just done that very thing: ridden from Amsterdam to Buxtehude.

That would be a dull knife, indeed: it is a long ride!

Eventually we crossed by the ferry *Kong Frederick* into Denmark. Along with the usual palaces, etc., we saw the Tivoli Gardens, a sort of Danish version of Disneyland, and the famous little mermaid statue.

One other trip by water is a special memory. Alma McCoy and I, as young school teachers, enjoyed the youthful emancipation of a first year of pay checks by taking a trip to Alaska via the Inside Passage.

We had traveled by car across the United States, with another friend, Rose Tschirhart. Rose had an aunt in Montana, and when we had left her there for a visit, Alma and I proceeded west. We suddenly decided that by driving all night we could reach Seattle in time to catch a boat. I have no remembrance of how we found out about the possibility – perhaps there was advertising along the way. Saddled by the burden of years as I now am, it seems wonderful that we could act so spontaneously! We decided; we went! In Seattle we just had time to wire home our plans, park the car, and go aboard. One didn't need advance reservations. What fun!

That rather strained the budget, and we ran out of money on the way home. It was not that we were improvident: I had a credit card, but it was a new concept at the time, and I didn't know it wouldn't be ac-

cepted beyond narrow limits around home. However, we managed. Ah, Youth! It was fun!

That was one of the long land trips, and with John and Anna there were many more of those. After we moved to California, we went back to Michigan every summer as long as Mother was alive. We used to get up about midnight to start east, so as to cross the desert before the day's heat made it uncomfortable. We always enjoyed stopping to look at the night sky in the desert. The stars look so bright and near that you feel you should have brought a basket to put some in.

There were many things we got in the habit of watching for; certain eating places, like the one in Missouri where we got fresh, home-made berry pie, and one called "The Coffee Pot," in Flagstaff, Arizona, where the coffee was especially good [and the owner wore coffee pot-shaped silver earrings. -Anna]. I always liked what I called "western breakfast"; a fried egg served with hashed brown potatoes. I don't know why I never fried potatoes for breakfast at home. On a trip they tasted like food for the gods.

We had happy food memories of Europe, too. We loved Dutch breakfasts. They gave us bread or rolls with sweet butter, a soft-boiled egg, and a variety of cheese and cold meats.

In Denmark you might have to wait for breakfast, but it would be worth the wait, because the rolls would be still-warm from the baker's oven. Another of Denmark's claims to fame in food is the variety of open-face sandwiches.

Russia had good and bad memories: the home-style dark bread was delicious, even if you didn't get butter with it. We were amazed at how tough chicken could be, even in soup!

Germany and Austria serve wonderful coffee, which can sometimes be very expensive, however. They also offer most marvelous *Kuchen* and other sweet breadstuffs that enhance the *Kaffee*. One I remember especially was *Kuchen* with fresh raspberries tightly packed, thimble to thimble, all over the top, all "glued down" and held together with a transparent jelly that made the berries look like crown jewels.

In Switzerland we found a bakery that made a small wheaten loaf stuffed with dried fruits and nuts. It made a super meal with cheese and fresh fruit.

In Norway we stayed at a hotel that holds the record for a breakfast smorgasbord that can never be topped. Besides cereals, breads, and such, there was the biggest selection of every kind of fish imaginable. And I, who don't like fish much, still remember how good it was.

John was always happy to get to Holland where he could get smoked eel. It sounded revolting — believe it or not, it is really delicious.

European plain-boiled potatoes are a treat. I think Germans eat the most vegetables.

In Holland you enjoy Indonesian foods.

Back home in San Francisco and environs, sourdough bread and fish. And lobster, in season. California also has Dutch bakeries that provide Dutch rolls and cookies for people with Dutch tastes. There are also groceries that specialize in ethnic food favorites. We used to get Italian bread still hot from the oven and “cracked olives” with Italian spices. With German liver sausage or Dutch cheese, — ummm —.

Well, that is enjoying travel even after you are home. I recommend it. Travel and staying home are both good, and having both is always a good idea if you can manage it.

The best trips of all are those that lead you home — to your “own folks,” your family or good friends.

And whatever you eat at their hospitable tables is the best food of all, fit for kings, and further garnished with first-choice company, in my recipe files, which are now Anna’s, they are labeled: “Mother’s old-fashioned cookies,” “Sal’s Springerles,” “Ruth’s make-ahead salad,” “Irma’s baked beans,” “Gladys’s brown bread,” “Anna’s sand cake,” etc. etc. etc.

And how happy I would be to make a trip that ended with potluck with any of you, any day! Since I have been there, I can do it in memory, and I often do!

Gute Reise! Welcome Home!

◀ 1995 ◀ CALIFORNIA ◀ CUPERTINO ◀ LIVENGOOD ◀ RIEDEL