

Harriet Report #15 – Ceci Takes Me For a German Ride – March 2001

I was just waiting around Delft, Holland, thinking about going home to Lake Superior when Ceci dropped by from Lake Superior to take me for a ride.

She had this incredible car like in James Bond with submarine capabilities and also rocket launchers. I invited her to stop in for some tea and store bought cookies and then we mounted the ladder to her true sports utility vehicle and launched for Houghton, Michigan where I observed the northern lights from the porthole. Unfortunately Ceci has trouble reading celestial maps and we overshot Duluth by 756 miles and landed in South Dakota. I immediately began whining to go home and Ceci pushed the rewind button and we were soon back in the Living Room in Delft.

Sure, Harriet. Tell me more about the purple banana too.

It is true that Ceci came to visit. I knew about it ahead of time. She was on her way home to Duluth from Krakow, Poland where her husband was a piece of work. I mean he did some work. She's one of the lucky ones with a loving husband that she loves back and has nothing to criticize. I want to learn that trick. He drove her almost to my house before taking a train back to his plane in Frankfurt. Then I was supposed to look after her. Hah! She took care of me, typical.

Ceci lived in Holland three times before and came to take me driving around in her perfectly average rental car, an Opel in fact and quite comfortable. She arrived on Saturday afternoon the 17th of March, 2001. It took a while to figure out the parking in Delft but finally we were able to leave the car and go walking around the sights. Then dinner, a movie, moving the car to better parking, and a cozy sleep back at my house. She said she slept great. She should have, she was in my freshly made up bed in my freshly vacuumed and DUSTED bedroom with my pot of blooming tulips on her table. I was in Peter's bed with his dirty sheets and poor Peter was on the floor. But I slept fine too. I love listening to my boys breathing, better than screaming.

Since it wasn't my turn until Friday to be parenting my sons, I could go anywhere that Ceci wanted. Her flight home was from Frankfurt, Germany on Thursday the 22nd and we both had time to kill. Ceci had a CAR! I had only been in a car in Holland five times. Four times to and from and to and from Margreet's house, and once from the airport when we first arrived with a truckload of luggage. Make that seven times, I went in a taxi twice in Amsterdam; once when I was going to miss my train, and once I was too lazy to figure out how to get across town with the boys in the rain.

Ceci and I fetched the car from the parking and found the highway with some difficulty. I'd never been this way on my bike obviously. It was a Sunday so

nothing was open. We stopped at the pottery factory in Delft and then went to Haarlem and saw the cathedral in the rain from the window of our lunch cafe. We had no Haarlem map, so our walk to the Frans Hals museum turned into a party of asking other pedestrians, including the same pair apparently from Russia three times. They said they'd been to that museum and wasn't it just over there? We found it of course, it was pleasant, but the walk was wet so I was full of Haarlem. We hopped in the car and drove to the beach in Nordwijk en Zee where we spent the night at the Admiral Hotel.

Ceci had been there many times before but she still let me wander from the most expensive hotel on the strand to the next and next hotel back checking prices for the night. I thought US\$400 was a little steep even if we did split a room. All the time, Ceci knew the Admiral was there, two blocks back from the beach and only US\$80 a night with a very nice family running it. They only had one baby last time Ceci stayed there, but now had at least two based on the bikes in the front hall.

And we ended up with the exact room under the eaves that Ceci had shared with her husband years before! But there was one thing different about her experience with me! You guessed it, I talk in my sleep. Although neither of us slept much because there was a raging storm with hail and extremely loud winds. I don't think it was even blowing that hard, it was just noisy! Ceci said I sat up and laughed in the middle of the night, but we know not to believe such a silly tale.

The next morning while sitting at breakfast, alone in the elegant dining room, we observed at least four entirely different days worth of weather out our window. Blue sky first which we exalted in. Then it snowed. Then it was blue again, then black threatening sky. Then it rained and a little more blue sky and finally, hail in the sun! Wow! It reminded us both of Houghton where if you don't like the weather you're supposed to wait ten minutes because it will change.

Wimpy and Brave at once, we drove two blocks to the beach and then got out to walk. But the wind blasted light weight Ceci almost over so we just hid in the windbreak of a dumpster on the edge of the dunes, looked at the four different weather systems fighting out over the North Sea in the clouds, and then fled for the car heater. Ceci wanted to drop in on some Dutch friends and make sure they weren't dead, seriously. One had been sick. It was an awkward trip for her, that's sure. None were dead! Yeah!

Back to Delft where we went out for a leisurely lunch and hung out at home with books and internet. Ceci's a big computer wiz and email addict. I never would have suspected her innocent 50 year old knitting nut exterior hid such a techie secret life, quite inspiring. I could have guessed from her shoes though.

Ceci could actually pass as European. Not only does she speak French, but she wears real shoes, dark colored with slight heels. And she has a long dark overcoat. The woman knows how to blend in. I appreciate her willingness to be seen with bright blue fleece jacket clad, WHITE tennis shoe wearing Harriet. I either blew her cover, or people guessed she was my personal tour guide, though I don't look rich enough for that.

On Tuesday we left for Germany. At first Ceci thought her plane was on Wednesday, but then realized it was really on Thursday. Good thing it wasn't the other way around. Since we had an extra day to kill, we decided to explore the Rhine river gorge and stay Tuesday night there. Wednesday night we had reservations at the Comfort Inn Frankfurt Airport. I was to take the train from the airport after I helped Ceci navigate the rental car return. I waited until she got checked in too, and then we said our goodbye, but that's not for days yet in this report.

Hey, you know what? There isn't much more to report except the annoying museum and miracle cathedral. We drove and I was a good companion and didn't fall asleep. It was my first time in Germany and I enjoyed eating meat with sour cream sauce and other gravies and fried potatoes. We drank some beer in a ladylike way at dinner. We played one spelling game when we were bored at my suggestion, but I didn't suggest it again when I saw how quickly Ceci creamed me. It was like playing scrabble with Phyllis.

We saw castles, that was cool. The river was really flooded and the islands totally submerged with trees growing out of the river. There was lots of shipping activity and Ceci kept noticing all the trains. The gorge was beautiful with impossible untterraced vineyards climbing up the cliffs.

For me the best was just seeing some nature that wasn't flat and having a friend to hang out with. Delft is a great little city, but most of what I see in Holland is orderly fields, buffer lines of trees, old city, all managed carefully like a chateau garden, not the wilderness of home in Houghton. Germany looked like they had some land left over to leave alone. It was heartening. And Ceci seems to like me just fine the way I am, not like some people almost not in my life

Ceci and I sought out with some difficulty and no map, St. Stephanskirche in Mainz to see the Chagall stained glass windows. The main priest there is my father-in-law's cousin and I'd heard about the windows many times. I didn't have the guts to ask for Claus Mayer, the cousin, when we got there though because I'm almost not a Mayer anymore what with the divorce and all. What would I say to him? So I just bought postcards instead. It was nice.

I stopped in Cologne on the train home and saw the incredible cathedral which was very moving standing unbombed in the middle of all the post World War II

construction. How did it get missed? Was that on purpose? I didn't know they had such good aim?

I also took myself to the nearby modern art museum which cost US\$5 to get in and I spent exactly 25 minutes including finding and using the bathroom. Oh well. I just felt really ho hum about the art, even though I'd studied it all in art history class. I just felt like I can think for myself finally and education or not, I don't really care about it. I know it's special, but so what.

I didn't get robbed, I didn't get bored, I read Ceci's Dave Barry novel, staying up until 1am in the bathroom to finish it before our trip to the airport five hours later. Ceci is a quiet sleeper, no snoring, sometimes not even breathing. That's a trick. She doesn't smell or take a long time in the bathroom, she doesn't say anything critical, and she drives perfectly well in Europe. It was great.

That Ceci, she really knows how to go for a ride. Thanks Ceci!