

“SO THERE WENT FATHER, A CURIOUS BEAST OF BURDEN, HEAVILY LADEN WITH LUGGAGE AND A COMATOSE CHILD”

Tom Marr, a Commerce Officer on secondment, recounts his “journey” to Bucharest, Romania with his two year old daughter, Tova. His wife and other daughter followed shortly thereafter.

Here we are, not yet 24 hours away from Ottawa, but still having experienced quite a lot. Tova’s performance can best be described as somewhat mixed, but courageous. The near 3 hour wait at Mirabel was enough to test even the most patient child, which, of course Tova isn’t. Thankfully, she met a little 7 - 8 year old called Melanie and the two played together actively. Tova ended up a little “Spinny” but it was a state honestly attained.

The budding friendship ended when we entered the plane and Melanie and her Mother moved through to Economy Class. You can imagine my joy at realizing that we were destined for Business Class. At least I could drink through Tova’s anticipated whinings.

It turned out we were in the Nursery Section as there were kids everywhere. Tova allied with two Hungarian girls and a Costa Rican and had a great time playing hard right to the bitter end. I’m not sure how much the other adult passengers enjoyed themselves but at least no one tried to stuff her out the window.

I occupied myself by eating and drinking moderately (conscious of the adventures still to come) and was pleased to meet the Father of the juvenile Hungarian Mafia that was running amok. He was a Hungarian Trade Commissioner posted for 4 years in Montreal and enroute home to Budapest. I rather envied his approach to transporting the kids back home. His wife would stay with them in Frankfurt while he dashed off to Dusseldorf to buy a Nissan Sentra Station Wagon. His secretary would then take the kids home while he and his wife meandered for two weeks. (I toyed briefly with defecating.) While we had a good chat, it did destroy any plans for sleep and the crumpled, slightly damp all over feeling crept up as the blinds were hoisted, the sun streamed in and fr̄uhst̄uck was offered. Bread and meat — another German Scarsdale meal.

Meanwhile Tova, having exhausted herself and most everyone else, finally collapsed — about 2-1/2 hours out of Frankfurt. This situation is problematic. Having finally succumbed, the kid is ready for 8 hours of dedicated snoozing. Father, more’s the pity, has two bags and two briefcases to carry.



It's Posting Time

What to do? Fleeting I considered abandoning the child.

This course of action hardly seemed right or fair to the child. So, there went Father, a curious beast of burden, heavily laden with luggage and a comatose child. Since all good things must sometime end, it was hardly surprising that Tova should awaken, at least sufficiently to send up a mournful wail. It was quite a sight — there in the middle of Frankfurt Airport, a profusely sweating “new Trade Commissioner” trying to calm a distraught child while changing her clothes in favour of a clean “hess”. (dress) Attempts at bribery through gifts worked only momentarily as few stores are open at 7:10 a.m. even in Frankfurt Airport. A calculator or porno film seemed somehow inappropriate.

The inspection of an IVECO Camper and the promise of a further flight successfully calmed the little one and the trip to Hannover was more or less uneventful.

At 4:30 a.m. Ottawa time, we arrived at the Park Hotel, Kronsberg. From the luggage congestion at the entrance, an idle passerby might have concluded that a convention had just arrived.

Sleeping Child once again hoisted over a shoulder, I strode to “Reception”, announced myself and confidently awaited confirmation of my reservation. “So Sorry Mr. Marr, you have no reservation.” “But, But,” the new Trade Commissioner suavely burbled, “Here, look at this paper, with a reservation for Aug. 16, duly confirmed by Canada’s Vaunted Foreign Ministry”.

(Now that should get a little action.)

Well it did. The reservation was found, but for Aug. 15. The panic welling within me was clearly evident from my face as the clerk quickly advised that there was a room, but not yet made up. (She immediately realized that I was not fussy.) Soon, the awakened, but happy Tova was bathing while staff made up the room. We were both a little blitzed by this point. Before nodding off, I phoned Volkswagen who confirmed that we could conclude our deal that afternoon.

After a couple of hours of sleep, a groggy Father and Daughter took a cab to Hannover Stoecken, (about 400 M’s away) and everything was wrapped up within an hour and I was driving our new car, feeling quite smug, adequately insured and briefed, but about to get lost. Not badly lost but enough to agitate a somewhat strung-out Parent.

We eventually recovered the hotel, smiled broadly at our new car, ate well and passed out, Father before Daughter, but the former awoke in time to insure the “bottom” was secured against leakage.

Eleven hours later we arose to a hearty German breakfast and hit the road. For owners of performance automobiles, the German autobahn is the place to be. My speed ranged between 120 KPH and 140 KPH and I was slow. I cannot remember a time when such careful attention had to be paid to the rearview mirror. With the coast seemingly clear I would pull out to pass an Opel, Golf or Ford Taunus. A casual glance into my mirror would reveal one of the well known symbols hurtling down the road — either Mercedes, B.M.W. or Audi. Many were going at least 160 KPH and would blow past us as though we were in a gypsy cart.

Scenically, Austria, proved a more attractive drive than had Germany. After Vienna, culture shock descended. Instead of breezing along carefree we began to meander from town-to-town on a small, fairly crowded road. The whole impression was one of a prosperous country beginning to go to seed.

At this point, the active narrative fades to black. Father and Child proceed to Budapest, then Cluj and then a final meandering drive to Bucharest where we settle into the Intercontinental Hotel. There were more adventures with dramatic and comic moments. However, as the growing fatigue restricted the time for writing, the effort at a full travelogue was abandoned.