



## A Genealogist's Dream Trip

*I think I have calmed down enough now to write...*

I first got hooked on genealogy by finding my parents and grandparents on the census records at the Brown County Library. Then going to the courthouse and finding vital records made me want to find out more. There were many 'aha moments' and big breakthroughs in the beginning years. Then the 'aha moments' slowed down and I worked more on putting the pieces of the puzzle together. My husband and I did make several trips to other states looking for dead relatives. (*One exciting find came in a dusty basement storage room of the Springfield, Ohio Courthouse. There we paged through and copied the actual will and sale of possessions of my great great great grandfather.*) The next logical step would be to go overseas, but I was never big on traveling *that far*. Then came my husband's surprise gift; a trip to Germany geared especially for genealogists. As a follow-up from the last OCGS newsletter, I would like to share a few memories from our trip.

**Family Tree Tours** (<http://familytreetours.com>) is an organization consisting of two partners, one in America and the other in Germany. For first-time overseas travelers like ourselves, it is the only way to go. The organizers purposely keep the group small, 12 to 20 people. Together they do the most incredible job of organizing the whole tour. We didn't have to worry about interpreters; they had an English speaking guide wherever we went. Transportation was no problem; they gave us our train passes (Bahn) along with the schedules. They set up meetings in the towns we wanted to visit with someone familiar with our ancestor's history. They also



set up tour guides so we could learn more about the history of our ancestors' homeland. The tour also allows plenty of free time to explore whatever we wanted. We experienced little German communities that have the authentic atmosphere. All their beforehand work and preparation paid off in a worry-free visit. A lot of preparation went into getting ready for the trip, but once we got there, it was all worth it!

Our first day our group went on a day cruise down the **Rhine River**. This was the perfect start of our journey in Germany. The German landscape is filled with vineyards (left), castles (above) and rolling hills.



We learned several things about the German culture while there. One of which, they are very punctual people; if the train (Bahn) leaves at 9:09, you better be on time. And if something still works, don't change it. The cobblestone streets and sidewalks have been there for hundreds of years and still work. *Although, after walking on them for a few days, I think they are highly overrated.* We visited two churches of Jake's ancestors and it was amazing to see they hadn't changed in a hundred-plus years. Before leaving on this trip I had kidded it just may be like the WDYTUA show where they hand you all these documents upon arrival. Well, guess what. It turned out even better. Besides years of ancestor documentation, we also found living relatives.

October is Family History Month

Prior to the trip we sent in the information we had on my husband's ancestors from the Rhineland District. Our first free day, our leaders organized a visit to **Zerf**. Jake's great grandmother, Eva Rommelfanger was born July 15, 1836 in Zerf. At the age of 18, Eva came to America with her mother and 5 siblings. Eva's father had died in 1846. It turned out the Mayor of Zerf, Manfred Rommelfanger is my husband's 4th cousin. He is also a professor and could not join us, but his wife, Edith Rommelfanger met us at the train in Saarburg and graciously spent the day introducing us to Zerf. We first visited St. Laurentius Church. It was an awesome feeling walking into the church and knowing it was just the same as when our Eva was baptized there. After having lunch, we went back to her house. She served a wonderful dessert, gave us ancestry papers and even allowed us to scan some of the old pictures from the family album. Edith had a very good command of English and we will always remember her kindness. She then drove us back to the train in Saarburg.



*St. Laurentius Church  
Zerf, Germany  
Jake and Edith*



*Jake visiting St. Stephanus,  
the church of his Jacobs'  
ancestors along with  
Mayor Müller of Bickenbach  
and Dr. Michael Frauenberger*

Another day a visit to the city of our Jacobs ancestors was arranged. Jake's great grandfather, Herman Jacobs was born in **Bickenbach** Dec. 4, 1822. The tour's German partner had warned us that the only Jacobs family there were not very interested and at first didn't want us to come to the house. He then contacted the Mayor of Bickenbach who agreed to show us the city and the church. When we arrived at the Mayor's house he presented us with a book of the city; The History of Bickenbach. We were extremely fortunate Dr. Michael Frauenberger, esteemed genealogist from Boppard could join us, as the others spoke no English.

After a few more calls to Willi Jakobs, he had relented. When we got to his house, his wife and their three grown children were there as well as his brother and his wife. We brought a scrapbook of our documentation, pictures and descendants of Herman Jacobs. Come to find out, Jake and Willi are third cousins. We showed them the baptism record of Willi's great grandfather. Their great grandfathers were brothers and not only that, but Jake and Willi were both born June, 1939. They couldn't have been nicer to us. They allowed us to copy some of his grandfathers records with invaluable dates and names. A memory we will never forget. We had thought we could visit cemeteries, but that is a whole other story.

In most cities in Germany, the cemeteries are very small and usually next to the church. They are only allowed to occupy a plot for 25 years. We asked what they did with the beautiful head stones and were told in most cases, they just throw them away. In the scrapbooks we brought to both German families we included a picture of Eva and Herman's tombstones. Eva died April 24, 1891 and Herman died Dec. 22, 1900. The German relatives were amazed their plots and head stones were still there.

There is so much more I could add about our trip. Another aspect that made it so much fun was the great group of people on the tour. We all shared a passion for genealogy and we all shared in the joy and excitement of each others discoveries. I have been asked many times if I would do it again. My response; "In a heartbeat!" It truly was a genealogist's dream trip!