

Mit Fahrrad: With Bike

When recalling the activities that brought me the most joy and sense of freedom in my youth, bike riding certainly makes it to the top of the list. It sits right up there with swimming and perching myself high in the fig tree with a book on a warm summer day. During the time of my 20's and 30's, I have very few memories of bicycling, so it came as a delightful rediscovery at 40. Moving just across the bridge from Heidelberg Altstadt, my bicycle became my primary means of transportation out of practicality. I fully embraced the freedom it offered. Never needing to wait in traffic or search for a parking place, my bike transported me to work at Heidelberg High School, to appointments, or downtown for shopping. My car was there for journeys outside of the city and for my girls when they began driving. It was with great reluctance that I gave up this freedom upon moving to Austin, out of fear for my safety. Just because Texas drivers may "drive friendly", that does not always mean they share the road well with people on bicycles.

While the first walk in the Freidrichsruhe Wald may signal my arrival in Germany, hopping on a bike and pedaling into Oehringen to pick up some groceries is the next. Last summer I did not drive a car during our entire stay in Germany and so far I haven't driven these first four weeks. However, a day hasn't passed that I haven't taken a bike ride. Some days it may be a short trip to the local organic grocers, others an evening loop with Sebastian that takes us down along the Ohre river and through the pristine Hofgarten.



In years past, we would set aside a few days to travel by bike through France with Sebastian. However, this summer we settled on day trips right here in beautiful Baden Wurtenburg. Sometimes it's just the three of us, but when we are lucky we get to participate in a *Hetzer- Hubele Radtour*. And let me tell you, these tours are pretty amazing for a host of reasons! Just a few of those being:

1. It's put together by Uncle Reinhold (brother of Marianne) who happens to be a planner extraordinaire.
2. I don't have to plan it.
3. I get to spend an entire day with some of the nicest people I know.
4. The scenery is spectacular.

But there are a few drawbacks as well. Starting with:

1. I get my butt kicked every time by Marianne, my 82 year old mother-in-law who passes me on every hill!

Now that you know the basics, let me share with you the beautiful tour we had last Friday. From Marianne's house we headed to the Oehringen station and loaded our bikes aboard the train bound for Schwaebisch Hall.



If you don't know about this picturesque city, you need to read this. Only 20 minutes from Oehringen, it sits down in the Kocher Valley offering visitors a brilliant contrast of sleek modern and well preserved historical architecture. I had not been for several years and was struck by the superb integration of a new shopping district into the old town. I certainly hope to return once more before our summer adventure ends.



From Schwaebisch Hall we headed north following the *radweg* along the Kocher River. The views from the rolling hills, through the forests and along the rushing stretches of the river were almost too much to take in. I found myself continually distracted by the beauty of a grove of trees, a patch of wildflowers, or grazing cows causing me to fall to the tail end of our group, there was just so much to see!

It is quite a task to manage 50 miles in few short hours so

there we kept up a good pace... rather, at least some of the group did! A few drink pauses along the way and we hit our lunch stop midday in Kuenzelsau. Finding a series of benches along the river front, we enjoyed our packed meals and conversation.



The next half of the trip took us again through beautiful countryside and charming villages. Before long we were back on a trail I know well that connects the small village of Ohrnberg with Oehringen. This stretch of the radweg was purpose-built two years ago in preparation of Oehringen's hosting of the 2016 Landesgartenschau. It is a scenic stretch again along the Ohre and is popular with local families on the weekends.

What a day we had! 50 miles of pure nature, pleasant conversations, delightful company, and with another plan proposed for one more ride together in the weeks to come.



Not written in English, but here is a map of our journey if you're interested. This site in English offers some further information of the entire 332k Kocher- Jagst cycle route.

A Heidelberg Daytrip

There are places and periods of time in our lives in which we enter one way... and exit another. The years spent in Heidelberg, Germany were just that for me. In reflection, I remember the pains to be equally as intense as the joys, with this period serving as an awakening to experience both. Each high note and every deep low vibration served to bring awareness to the fact that there was an incredible strength within, that I had not even begun to access, along with a force far more powerful than I could even imagine, that could serve as my guide.



Oh Heidelberg, where I walked the banks of the Neckar and the terraced vineyards, soul searching for answers and breaking down barriers that no longer served me. Heidelberg, where I navigated the complexities of divorce and child custody, lost the only community I had come to know, faced a fear-rendering diagnosis of melanoma, let go of all of the pharmaceuticals that held me together for years, experienced bullying and harassment in the workplace for the first and last time, and finally came to the realization that I had everything it would take to stand up for myself in the face of each and every circumstance.

And then, Heidelberg, the years in which I gave birth to my third child, a son who would teach me it was time to learn new ways to do things, where I made the first connections with my biological family and found answers to questions I had carried for 40+ years, the place I discovered the healing power of my own body through Homeopathic treatment, and discovered the joy in being my own best friend.

In returning and walking the same streets and paths as I did in those times of fear, self-doubt, and mistrust, I could not help but marvel at the transformations I had allowed to occur. Just as in *The Alchemist*, the years that would follow provided the perfect setting to experience true healing and personal

growth.

"...when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it."

And so, on a typical Heidelberg summer day with mixed skies full of showers and sunshine, Sebastian and I set out to see what memories would join us. Upon arriving at Heidelberg HBF, we hopped upon the Strassenbahn heading to Bismarkplatz. Halfway to our destination, we decided to forego S-bahn and walk, given the weather and the fact we could wander as we like. After some discussion, we decided to make our way into the Altstadt and for a snack at one of the new vegan restaurants. (Something completely unheard of ten years ago!)



Along the way we passed Sebastian's favorite playground as a child and I couldn't help but share a story. Always an early riser (and I do mean early), preschool aged Sebastian and I would often head out as early as 7am on Saturday mornings in search of the first bakery that opened and a playground. Feeling adventuresome one Saturday, we made it all the way into the Altstadt and he was thrilled to have the entire playground to himself. I secured a tea for myself and settled onto a bench only to be startled by a loud and emphatic "schimpfen" from the man who lived in a flat directly above

the playground. Clearly our good fortune conflicted with his attempt to sleep in on a Saturday morning.



We carried on our walk down Maerzgasse, making our way over the aged cobblestones deep into the alstadt. I marveled at how quickly a 15 year old can cover the distance that might have taken hours just a few short years ago! With luck on our side, we approached the café of our choice just at the moment that the sunny skies turned black and quickly dropped enormous amounts of rain. What a delight to sit in the cozy café, sip some tea, and watch the storm wash through the alleyways, as eventually the skies returned to sparking sunshine. We made quick work of our shared plate of gluten free pasta and gorgeous lemon basil sauce and were soon ready to head out once again.

In giving Sebastian the choice of walking though the hauptstrasse full of shops or along the river, I must say I was not surprised at all with his decision. We wove our way through the narrow streets until we came upon the Alte **Brücke**, a classic symbol of Heidelberg with the picturesque schloss in the background. Having taken the obligatory photos, ones we never captured as residents, we set on our way along the river's edge. Everything fresh and sparkly from the rain, with the warmth of the sun on our backs, it could not have

been a lovelier walk together as we shared clips of memories that spontaneously popped into our heads.



Once we came to Neuenheim, the village just across the river from central Heidelberg we caught the S-Bahn towards Dossenheim where we would be meeting up with a dear friend and former neighbor.

Dossenheim, a village just outside of Heidelberg, is nestled into the picturesque terraced vineyards and was our home for our final three years in Germany. The walks we took in those hills, rain, shine, or snow, taught me the healing power of spending time with nature. It was here that I began to reconnect with my creative spirit and intuition that would guide my coming years. (A remnant of those sometimes unconventional ideas still lives on and it's a little known fact that I once started a goat farm. It's a great story requiring more space than this, but here is the short version: About a year prior to our moving to the U.S., I was inspired to begin a small farm co-op with five local families, all with young children. It was quite the endeavor and believe it or not eleven years later it's still going! One original family remains as well as these two crazy goats! What a treat for Sebastian to see them once again and to see the stunning area in its entire summer splendor.)



The day was over all too soon and as we entered the train station heading home to Oehringen, I was thrilled to hear Sebastian suggest a return trip in order to see what we had not been able to fit into our day.

Friedrichsruhe Wald: A Hubele Whole Family Favorite

Fully arriving in Germany cannot occur until we take our first walk through the Friedrichsruhe Wald. It is truly a grounding source for all of us. For me, this connection began with my first trips to Oehringen 17 years ago, when Joachim and I's Sunday visits were completed with a walk in the forest. Independent of the season, this was as important as the meal we shared.



Before long our visits included Sebastian and his kinderg wagon (stroller) and, eventually, it became the place for Oma and Opa to take 5 and 6 year old Sebastian for some freedom to run and explore. As our lives progressed getting there took a bit more effort, but the fresh air and towering trees always made it worthwhile.



While each of us has our own relationship with the Freidrichsrue Wald, mine has certainly evolved over the past years due to my work with a therapy made directly from the buds. What I have learned of Gemmotherapy has certainly paved the path for a deeper respect and connection to the trees and

the forest. Always the history teacher, and an eternal student, I still have so many questions as to the origins of the area around the forest and Joachim's own family connection. While I don't have all the answers, yet I will fill you in on the bit I have learned.

My mother-in-law's childhood home sits on the edge of the Friedrichsruhe Wald. She and her siblings grew up with the forest as an extension of their home. It held opportunities for foraging and further adventures as a child. Joachim also has fond memories of playing in the forest with his brother and cousins while his mother spent the afternoon helping the family with farm chores.

The area around the forest drew attention in the early 1600's when the Count of Hohenlohe developed a hunting park in the forest and the surrounding area now occupied by the Wald and Schloss Hotel. Sadly though, what he created was destroyed during the 30 year war.

In an attempt to recreate the Count's concept, the Prince of Hohenlohe, Friedrich II, built a small castle to be used as his hunting lodge and an expansive garden to enjoy. With that development, much of the forest was cleared to make way for the growing of crops. When Friedrich II passed away the area was named Friedrichsruhe in his honor.

The area continued to be maintained by members of the royal family until post WWII when what was once the schloss became a hotel. Today this hotel sits directly across from my mother-in-law's family residence, which is now home to her brother and his family.

Returning to subject of the forest, it is a protected space and nature preserve that continues to be enjoyed by families from the village of Friedrichsruhe as well as guests of the hotel. Rich in history and beauty, it continues to thrive and offer those who enter it a connection to nature and what is

real and true. This is exactly why it has become such a ritual for us to pay a visit as soon as we arrive, very much like honoring an elder member of the family, and ending each day with a sunset walk through its calming presence.



Kartoffel und Mangold

One of the most enjoyable experiences during my summers in Germany is preparing locally inspired meals directly from the garden and this kartoffel und mangold is a fine example of how simple ingredients with simple preparation can be so delicious.



It all began when Oma, who keeps a keen eye on what is ripe

and ready to eat in the garden, announced that the mangold (chard) must be eaten. Further, it was quickly determined that it would be prepared with steamed new potatoes as this was a childhood favorite of Sebastian's.

Off I went to the garden, armed with a kitchen basin and knife, returning it full to the brim with gorgeous tender leaves and a few baby grasshoppers who I promptly returned their family.



The preparation took only minutes. After a careful cleaning, the stems are removed and the leaves are steamed whole. Once tender, they are chopped and then sautéed briefly in a bit of olive oil and finely diced onions. In the meantime, new potato quarters are peeled and steamed as well. The two are gently combined and seasoned with salt, fresh ground pepper, and nutmeg. German home cooking done right!

Working from Germany, Hubele Style

There was never a question as to whether we **could** transition our work and our lives to Germany for the summer. But whether it would happen with grace and ease this year was the question!

Arriving

After ten years of traveling back and forth from Austin to Germany, I find it amazing that we can now accomplish this in one flight, directly into Frankfurt. When all goes well, like it did this week, it is a seamless journey. A night flight out of Austin could not be more perfect for delivering us into Frankfurt and allowing us to be under way on the autobahn by 3pm local time.



The two hour drive to Oehringen takes us past the village of Dossenheim, where we last lived among the terraced vineyards before moving to Austin, as well as Heidelberg itself where Sebastian was born. So many memories and they all flood back in as we pass each exit sign. I doze on and off, still traveling in my head between Austin and Germany, my subconscious drifting into the past and back to the present.

Just a bit after 5pm, we arrive to what seems like the exact picture of what we left behind a short eleven months ago. The neat and tidy house of Joachim's childhood, the roses in perfect bloom, the precise rows of the vegetable garden in

full swing, Marianne's welcoming arms and delicious smells drifting from the kitchen.



After hauling our luggage up the stairs and washing up, we sit down to a much awaited meal of fresh green salads direct from the garden and a delightful mixed vegetable soup seasoned with ginger and chilies. Nothing tastes better than that first meal after a long journey. A bit of unpacking and walk through the neighborhood was about all we could handle before collapsing for that first deep sleep of jet lag.



Settling In

The morning sun fully rose in our bedroom window by 5am, signaling the new day and it wasn't much longer until I gave into it. After our traditional swim, we all started out with organizing ourselves, creating individual work spaces, and sorting out any immediate needs. Still much ahead of the lists, however, we found ourselves quickly out of steam and up

against technology challenges we had hoped to not encounter. A trip or two into town, some extra long internet cables, and by nightfall it finally seemed we accomplished all that was needed.

For the next month, all three of us have commitments to keep so establishing some organization was important. Joachim will be continuing the role he plays with the Austin start-up, Square Root, working between his team in India and his Texas colleagues. Having just finished my latest book, my workload was already feeling slightly like a holiday with only a month of remote client appointments and an online course I am completing. Sebastian has plans to be apprenticing with a local metal worker, which I will write more about later, and is also completing an online course for Austin Community College.

Day two arrived with a bit more ease. Following our morning swim and a breakfast on the terrace, we each settled into our workplaces with functioning internet, the garden got tended, groceries bought, and the midday meal prepared all in harmony. Shifting the start of our workdays from morning to the afternoon and our family time together from the evening to morning, may take a few days to flow but we will get there. Any efforts on our part are richly rewarded by quality time with our German family, a life slightly slower than what we lead in Austin, and an abundance of local and organic fruits and veggies that make family meal preparation all the more enjoyable.