

Saturday, October 04, 2008

In Which I Abscond to Europe

It seems like only yesterday I landed in England (because I did) and now I sit in the London City airport awaiting our departure to the last remaining Grand Duchy in the world, Luxembourg. I have a scant 20 minutes before the flight boards, so until there is time to write more, a selection of photos from the journey thus far:

Bruce Henrietta on her first trip to Europe:



A shot of Emerson College, a small school in Forest Row based on the teachings of Rudolph Steiner:



Farmer John striking a pose in the Eurythmy studio (background: all the different eurythmy poses, each representing a different sound):



My angelic halo by the stained glass window (also in the strikingly pink eurythmy studio):



Farmer John's beloved Swisher Sweets. He doesn't smoke them, but rather enjoys the flavor of their wrappings. I transported twenty cases to him from the states as he was running dreadfully low... when he first said he was sending me a case to transport along, I was DELIGHTED to have so much CANDY with me. When they arrived, I realized the "sweets" had nothing to do with tasty sugar:



Lastly, taken just a moment ago, Farmer John matches the menu:



I think I have a few more moments before I have to log off... for those who have zero idea as to what, exactly, I'm doing over here (and who have grown frustrated with my answer of "uhhh... looking at farms? Biodynamic farms? And I think we're going to be in a few different countries?"), I present to you a few different links:

My traveling companion (and instigator of the trip), Farmer John:

this is his film: <http://www.angelicorganics.com/film>

this is his farm website: www.angelicorganics.com

The purpose of the trip is to view and tour biodynamic farms, gain information, and take it back to the states so he can continue to develop his OWN biodynamic farm. What is biodynamic farming, you ask? Thank goodness for wikipedia...

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biodynamic_farming

That link is part of a series on Anthroposophy, the driving philosophy behind Farmer John's endeavors. Verrrrrry interesting, Farmer John...

On to Luxembourg!

Saturday, October 04, 2008 (much, much later)

In Which We Get An Upgrade

So on LuxAir, even for short flights, they give you a full-on SNACK! Little sandwiches, a sugar coated cherry muffin, and then on your way out they give you CANDY. I think it is perhaps my new favorite airline. Too bad it's fairly local to Luxembourg.



I would also have all of you know that I am currently in charge of driving the rental car. Not too significant in and of itself, but this particular rental car is a MANUAL car, the likes of which I have only driven on Nantucket. There were absolutely zero automatic cars available because no one drives the things in Europe (and when we did a last minute inquiry at the airport, just in case, the looks of incredulity at the very THOUGHT of such a thing were pretty impressive to behold), and so voila! I am now in charge of a manual car, and much like riding a bicycle, I have managed to maneuver this vehicle with something approaching ease (just as long as I concentrate very, very hard). Also, there is a major difference between driving a brand new manual car and the beaters I'm used to on Nantucket - I am astounded by how easily the gears shift in our European vehicle.



And so, without even stalling one time and with the help of the soothing British accent of our GPS guide, I chauffeured us to our hotel for the evening. Well, we THOUGHT it was our hotel, except for the slight issue of our lack of reservation. It's not like it never got MADE, we had a confirmation number and everything, it just somehow never got from the internet booking service to the HOTEL. Because they



felt so badly about it, they ended up giving us the last room available in the hotel for a substantial discount, i.e. the penthouse suite. Woohoo!! It is not perhaps as penthouse as, say, the Trump Tower, or even the Hilton, but still. There's a jacuzzi, a rolltop desk, a small sitting area, a fake fireplace... it has it all. If we have to share a room, THIS is the way to do it.

And now, a few random shots from our wanders around the city:



Lastly, we did not eat here, as delectable as the sign makes it sound:



Instead I ordered the "hearty salad" at another restaurant - the healthy choice, as it was lettuce, carrots, cucumbers, endive, fried potatoes and an egg over easy on top, all smothered in a hollandaise sauce dressing. It's healthy because I opted out of the bacon.

Sunday, October 05, 2008

In Which We Begin to Explore Farms. Biodynamically.

Today was the first true day of assistantship to my farming friend. Up we were, bright and early, to take leave of the city of Luxembourg and head out to its more suburban areas. About 25 minutes north (I THINK north. let's just say north) of the city we reached our first real farm - that of Anja, Tom, and their three ridiculously adorable children. Anja and Tom were in year 2 of a multi-year project of designing - absolutely from scratch - their own biodynamic farm. They had gathered most of the funding, the land, and the close-to-final architectural plans for the project. This NEW farm is to be located just down the street from the farm where they currently reside, i.e. Tom's family farm, and will double their current operation. Farmer John, Anja and Tom spent around 5 hours exploring both their current situation and their future situation, and I, of course, spent most of MY time taking pictures of adorable animal noses.





I also managed to find a satanic baby goat...



...and a bunch of other goat butts to boot(ie).



After an entirely too satisfying lunch of these savory torts that I am determined to somehow mimic (one was made of beets and apples, the other of carrots and other shredded stuff), Anja led us to Schanck-Haff, the next farm on our list (this one fully developed). At this particular biodynamic farm, they not only grew carrots and potatoes, but also had a dairy operation, a cheese-making facility, a farm store (open two days a week), and a small bakery. Their dairy cows, by the way, did nothing but stare.

We also spent a good amount of time ogling machinery. Okay, JOHN spent a good amount of time ogling machinery. That's, like, his thing. If that happens to be your thing as WELL, then remind me to send you photos. I can fuel your machinated dreams with potato pickers/sorters, carrot pickers/sorters, carrot washers, earth tillers, spikey things, rumbly things, etc.

I will show you ONE piece of machinery, however. This is called a football (in American that would be "soccer") car:



I don't know how it works, exactly, but there's mesh for a windshield and something big attached to the front bumper. Jos' (the farmer and our host) son does this kind of thing as his hobby.

To prove to you I tell you only the truth, here is the starey dairy:



Also, there's a good reason for all that potato machinery mentioned above - freakin' so many potatoes my eyes almost fell out (or maybe the POTATOES' eyes almost fell out! Ah hahahahhahaaa!). This was just a small part of the whole (we were in the dedicated potato cellar):



Remember that show Chip and Dale Rescue Rangers? And then there was the slightly overweight mouse pilot who couldn't resist cheese, and when he smelled it his eyes would bulge, his moustache would spring into a lightning bold-esque shape, and he would defy gravity and lift off the ground? Well anyway, this is some cheese:



Oh my gosh and then the Schanck family fed us TOO! I was smart and remembered to take a picture of the spread. In case you're like me and think "oooh! Look at that delicious CHEESE to the right of the bread!" I must warn you now that that is NOT cheese, it is butter (luckily they told me before I ate an entire hunk). Life is just tastier on farms (not pictured - apple cake and homemade whipped cream, i.e. the love of my life and the bane of my existence; though, let it be said, I drank raw milk all day and have had ZERO ISSUES. Psychological? Maybe).



And now? Now, I sit in a pink hotel, in a room with a lovely bed calling my name. I can ignore it no longer.

Tuesday, October 07, 2008

In Which I Learn Things and Tell You About Them

Today I learned how adept cow's tongues are. One calf kept trying to swoop my hand into its mouth and it very nearly succeeded.



I learned to stand in a field and attempt to feel what happens when I concentrated on my left hand and then have my right hand come to join the left, and then tried to experience the difference between standing in a newly plowed furrow vs. standing on a field with sprouts of various sorts coming up around me.

I learned the drive along the Rhein has so many CASTLES. Why so many? Why don't I have one?

I learned a valuable lesson in navigating foreign traffic - I attempted to work my way around what seemed to be a stopped and unmoving line of traffic by navigating our vehicle up an incredibly steep and narrow cobblestone street, only to discover the road at the top to be a pedestrian-only walkway. I then was able to experience, for the very first time, the lovely feeling of having 50 incredulous Germans stare as I more-or-less successfully backed all the way down the way I came, only forcing ONE van to reroute itself to let me by (and the scratch on the side view mirror from a tight corner was only a *superficial* one). I wound BACK to the terrible back up, which by that point was moving again (yay!) only to stop again very suddenly (boo). Turns out all those cars were waiting for trains to pass so they could get across the tracks to the main motorway. The gates would come up, three cars would get through, the gates would go down, ten minutes would pass, a train would finally come shooting by, the gates would come up, three cars would get through... and so on and so forth.

I learned that land mines are everywhere - I was exploring the biodynamic research center we visited today and, in attempts to get into every nook and cranny, I went to explore this great looking outdoor fountain setup. Before I stepped into that area, I was quick enough to notice there were several large holes in the ground where they were apparently storing big buckets of water, a veritable field of booby traps. I smugly patted myself on the back for being so aware of my surroundings as I picked my way around the recessed small pools.

My pants are still drying in the car.



I learned that traveling means never enough sleep, and I learned that I am quite okay with this. Well, as long as there's coffee.

Wednesday, October 08, 2008

In Which I Make a Shocking Discovery

I learn more things every day.

Today I learned how an electric fence works. Twice! It's a strange endorphin rush to be slightly electrocuted. I swear, though, it wasn't like I touched a fence and was all "oooh 'tricity I LIKE it" and then promptly became a voltage junkie and went around trying to find electric fences to touch. I was just THAT stupid two times (though they happened at two different locations, and the fences were v. different from each other, plus the second fence was holding in donkeys and I consider it a BOOBY TRAP to have donkeys with such whiskery schnozzes held behind electric fences. How can you resist this face???)



The morning started off, however, with the effort of dragging myself out of bed, eating chocolate cereal and coffee for breakfast in an

effort to get to some level of alertness whether through sugar or caffeine, and then jumping in the car with Farmer John, our host Tadeu, and his daughter Charlotta. Off we traveled to Wiesengut, home of the University of Bonn's organic research center. There we were met by Ulrich, a most amazing gentleman and stupendously intelligent scientist. Ulrich was responsible for designing the entire research farm and its facilities back in 1985 when the organic agriculture department was formed. He is intimately connected with all activity and experiments and production occurring on the farm - there was no question about Wiesengut that he could not answer.



His obvious enthusiasm for the farm and his work surrounding it was catching. After seeing such things as their beautiful Limousin beef cattle, a noisy gaggle of endangered geese, small patches of arugula experiments and rolling fields of carefully monitored crop rotations, we were all alive with wonder and excitement about all the possibilities and discoveries going on at the farm.

But before the tour, we began our visit with coffee, tea, cookies and a thorough overview of the farm and its history. In the middle of this he produced a platter full of the most beautiful grapes and said that we HAD to try them. He expounded upon the health benefits of these excellent, vital muscatels (grown on the farm) and told us that the more we ate, the more alert and energized we would feel. Needless to say, I grabbed fistfuls and downed them as fast as I could (half) chew them. I ate so many, in fact, that the natural acid of the grapes began to burn my tongue and the sides of my mouth.



Five bunches of grapes, three cookies, four espressos and a few hours later, still exhausted, I shocked myself on the first electric fence. One eye sprang open. After jolt number two, I was wide awake.

Shock therapy, people. Better than caffeine.

Friday, October 10, 2008

In Which We Wrap Up Germany and Want to Take it Home as a Present

FJ and I are back in our luxury suite in the 'burg. You know, that little Grand Duchy we like to use as a bookend for our trips to Germany. The hotel was quick to give us our favorite room 700 at the same discounted price as the last time. Either this means we're

awesome, or this room is only worth the discounted price (maybe less) and they are rubbing their duchy hands together and silently giggling with glee. "Stupid Americans," they cackle to each other. "So easy to take advantage of!"

Reason #429 why I like Farmer John: Farmer John is in a very pensive mood tonight, pondering all these things we have seen and done in the last bit of time, and planning his next steps in his farm's 23 year plan. Yet, even when pensive, staring fixedly at a certain spot in the table and absentmindedly twirling a martini glass, one notices the very carefully folded napkin tucked into his sweater, placed there specifically due to the delightful complimentary accent it adds to his outfit.



Reason #430: Farmer John, over there on his computer, exclaimed "I'm COSMIC right now!" He kind of IS.

Yesterday found us back in Dottenfelderhof (our time there was far from complete when we left it last Tuesday morning). We arrived just in time for lunch (totally on purpose) and then went to speak with Knut, one of the founding pioneers of Dottenfelderhof, and now a 77 year old man with the most AMAZING beard. He spoke English quite well, though not as well as he would like, and we were able to gain his perspective on the past 40 years of the farm - what it was when it began, how it has changed, how it is going forward. I spent the whole time wanting to pet his beard. He was kind enough that maybe he would've let me, but I didn't ask. That's him to the right there, in a stalkery picture I took when I first encountered his facial magnificence.



And then FJ and I drank coffee and chatted and then we were off so FJ could lead a class with Dottenfelderhof's group of biodynamic farming students, many of whom were already farmers and were looking to

explore the biodynamic method. FJ talked about his explorations with his own farm and all the things he's discovered on his farm visits and it was a whole mix of english and german and hilarious translations back and forth ("Irony? What is this word, irony?" [frantic looking up in the single german/english dictionary on the table] "Here it is!! It's... um, irony. Ee-ron-ee."), and it was a great hour and a half and we ended with looking at pictures of FJ's farm and then watching Lesley Littlefield Freeman's Farmer John video, available [HERE: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6oNnp7Ohpw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6oNnp7Ohpw). So great!

We also did lots more awesome farm stuff, like drink Dottenfelderhof Riesling and go talk to Dottenfelderhof's in-house biodynamic scientist about the connection between the moon, constellations and planting, and talk to their orchard and vegetable guy about building warmth in the farming process and whether horses were a good means of doing so and how to continually enhance the farming experience, and we ate more homemade bread and jam and soup and cheese and also Heidi, our favorite Australian translator, took us to see the cows and dairy, and then we stayed a bit longer today than expected (juuust long enough to have lunch before we left) and hopped in the car and took the scenic route through a gorgeous national park back to Luxembourg and walked to dinner and saw THESE:



Life, in these crazy times, is good.