

Finding Village of Esch sur Sure – October 1980

In October 1980 I flew from Jedda, Saudi Arabia at the start of a trip to United States, on my 30 day leave from my work at Al Hada hospital, in Taif, Saudi Arabia. On the way I wanted to see different countries, before returning to Taif, so flew to Athens, Rome, Venice, Munich, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, back to Frankfurt, Germany and then to Chicago and California where I lived. I wanted to find the birthplace of my maternal grandparents, in the village of Esch sur Sure (Esch on the river Sure), Luxembourg. I was alone, found my own way on airplane, and trains.

The time was late October 1980 and I finished the areas in Germany that I wanted to visit, bought a train ticket for Luxembourg City, the capitol of the country. I found the proper train, and track (always have to ask and make sure I am on the proper coach). A man entered my compartment, he was going to Luxembourg too – this was determined mainly by sign language and the word Luxembourg for he spoke only French. At least it was someone to try conversing with, I was always alone in train compartments before. We made slight conversation, I said I had come from Saudi Arabia – he smiled, asked if I spoke Arabic, I said yes, slightly. He said “mai salama”, I smiled and then added a few more Arabic words. Those were the only Arabic words he knew. He was pleasant, a very well dressed man, tried to give me the idea of getting a hotel at the “terminus”. I gathered this to mean the train station and decided I would do so. We arrived in Luxembourg City at 9:08 p.m. – these trains do travel right on time! The gentleman said “au revoir” outside the station and I started looking at the hotel signs all across the street, there were many of them. The travel information kiosk inside the station was closed so I walked for about two blocks up and down the busy street, taking in the city atmosphere. I chose an Inn that also had a café, went in and asked about a room. The lady clerk said one was available, let me look at it, and it was o.k. I registered, took off my coat, deposited shoulder bag, went to the café and had food and a glass of white wine. While eating, I heard that Reagan had won the presidential campaign in U.S.A. Soon I retired and slept well.

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 6

Today is my son Tom’s birthday, I remember the day well. I was awakened about 6 a.m. by the garbage men down on the street below, dumping the cans hard against the truck. Guess they do that in every country – except in Egypt a “garbage girl” collected your bags from the house, and deposited them in a donkey-led cart on the street. I dressed, had breakfast downstairs in the café, and got ready to see what I could in Luxembourg City. The faces I see on men and women, remind me of the features of my relatives, particularly nephew Dave Fitzenz, and some of my Gengler cousins. I asked about a tour, at the train station, found I just missed the tour bus. Too bad, for there are fortresses here dating back to the 12th and 13th centuries, also the Grand Duke’s palace is in this city.

After asking for a map, and more information I set out, took a city bus, (cost 16 francs), to the historic portion of the city. It was just like pictures I’ve seen of German towns, winding streets, a deep valley where old casements still stood, also parts of towers from fortresses,

etc. – all very interesting. It was cold, and crisp, but I was bundled up well. I stopped a couple of times at shops, bought fruit or pastry to eat. I didn't manage counting out the francs very well, was not used to the money yet, and hardly anyone spoke English. When I arrived at the large cathedral, I talked to three Australian girls, each with backpacks, and seeing the sights. They gave me a different map and some tips on what to see, said they stayed at youth hostels, took trains, and were heading next to southern areas, to include Venice. I tried to follow the map given me, but after walking a long way down into the valley, discovered, by asking in a little bakery shop, that I should retrace my steps, toward town center. I did so, and came back to the Central Gare, the train station. There I asked about a train to Esch on Sure, the little town of my Gengler grandparents, there would be one leaving in 15 minutes to Ettlebruk, and another one at 6 p.m. that connected with a bus going to Esch sur Sure. I decided to take the earlier train, so I could see the countryside in daylight. At 6 p.m. it would be dark. As we sped along, I noted the terrain was hilly, mainly farm land, or pasture, with small villages along the way. The houses all had neat yards and nice looking vegetable gardens. The cold weather had evidently come on very quickly, a lot of the gardens still had spinach (now wilted), tomato plants, and cabbages in them. The Germanic ancestors were all very hard working, and industrious, kept neat homes and yards. There were nice white lace curtains in windows, all hanging perfectly. What a contrast to style of living in Saudi Arabia !

Ettlebruk was the 8th station after Luxembourg City. I got off the train o.k., there was a nice train station, a pot belly stove had a fire glowing inside for warmth. A taxi driver was stationed outside, I asked the price for a ride to Esch, he said 670 francs. I wanted to look around a bit, decided to wait for the bus a little later. I enjoyed a local meal, good pork chop, potatoes, vegetable and endive lettuce with sweet-sour dressing just like I was taught to make, I have not had that in a long time, all tasted very good. I bought an English newspaper, and read all about Reagen's election and Carter's defeat. Then I enjoyed the atmosphere of this town, went into the church when I passed it, and thanked God again for this lovely trip, also said a prayer for Tom, on his birthday. Wandering about the stores, bought a delicious pastry at a little shop, then went to the station to await the bus to Esch. I could see myself living comfortably in a town like this, Aurora, Illinois (my home town) used to be smallish and friendly like these people appeared to be to each other. My problem was, they all spoke either French or Luxembourg language. A few flakes of snow were falling, the sky was leaden grey all day, it was not good for taking pictures.

Later. I had waited a few hours for the bus, but was glad I did so. The ride from Ettlebruk was on roads that immediately headed upward and I could see in the early evening light that it was beautiful country, with forests, and also cleared land. The bus stopped at about 5 different villages (some were only a couple of houses) and wound around on a narrow road. At each stop I wondered if this was my place to get off, and kept saying "Esch"? The driver would shake his head, no. We finally came to a crossroads, close to a village and near a river, the driver nodded his yes, to my query. 3 people and myself got off, they quickly walked away in the darkness. The bus driver pointed out that the hotel was the lighted building about 1 ½ blocks down a road, so I walked alone on the lightly snow-covered roadside, along the river, to the hotel. I passed one lighted barn, but saw no one. Arriving at Hotel Du Moulin, which I later found was built in the 1700's and had been a manor, I entered, probably surprised the proprietor who spoke French, and some English.

Who is this little, old lady coming into the hotel at night time ?, he probably thought. I told him why I was here, that I wanted to find the Gengler house, the home of my forebears. He said there were no Gengler families here now, but some DeMuths, and Wiltgens, these names I had often heard from my mother, when speaking of Luxemburg families. I'm glad I made the effort to come here, tomorrow I'll explore the little town (250 population). I only wish my mom could be here, she would love it. Her mother and father were born and raised here, married in the church, still standing. I ordered a dinner, after he showed me the nice, big room upstairs, that I would have, I ate in the large, lovely dining room, linen tablecloths graced every table. I was the only person eating.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 7

I slept very well in the queen-size bed, with the heavy comforters over me. The rooms are not as warm as we keep our homes, but I had warm clothing. I awakened a short time before I heard the beautiful church bells ring, it was still dark outside, and I could hear water going over the little dam just outside the hotel. This building probably belonged to a count, or some such person. It is beautiful, the rooms are very large, original old dark wood adorns walls, a very wide staircase ascends to the second level, the carved banister is of the same beautiful wood. There are casement windows, and doorways are very wide. The lower floor has been made into dining rooms, and from one of them you look out over the river, to the high wooded escarpment on the other side. This is truly a picturesque place, and in summer and fall, this area is a great tourist attraction, the village has not changed, or grown, it is within a looped area of the Sure river. The weather is cold now, but not too bad, a little snow fell last evening but it is almost all melted already.

My three pieces of baggage are checked at the Frankfurt airport, I am only carrying an overnight flight bag on my shoulder, can't be bothered with a suitcase. I have learned to travel light, I wash out blouse and undies each night, in the hotel, they are dry by morning, so I always have clean clothes. There was a shower in a neat, compact cupboard type compartment, in my room, added of course, since the time of the dukes and counts. I enjoyed using it before going down to the dining room for breakfast, as I ate I enjoyed watching the river still flowing along, as it did when my grandfather Frederick Gengler fished in it. My mother always talked about his tales of doing that - maybe that is why I love fishing so much! After breakfast in the beautiful room, with tables set with yellow cloths, crystal goblets and shining silverware, I set out on a walking tour of the village. The hotel proprietor gave me some help, stating the village was small, directed me toward the post office, and the church. As I passed houses, noted everything so neat and clean, curtains were pure white, and hung just so, in the windows. Cobblestone paths lead between houses, and up the steep hills beyond. I passed a lady walking in the street, spoke to her, she could not understand me. I went on, passed a small store, spoke to a lady coming out from it, she said "gud morgen". I replied in English, asked if she could speak with me. She knew a little English, I asked her if she knew of a Gengler house, she couldn't help much, took me into the store. The man inside spoke a little English, but was of no help in my query. Then the lady who escorted me into the store, said I should see the Pastor of the church, pointed it out just down the street a little way, said he could help me. I went through the gate of the high iron fencing, knocked at the rectory door, the pastor

answered my knock. He was very courteous, spoke fluent English. I explained that I was on my way from Saudi Arabia to America, going through Europe, and wanted to find the house of my grandparents Gengler.

He immediately got on the telephone, called two different people, speaking in Luxembourg to them, asking about earlier residents Frederick and Maria Gengler, the names I had given him. From the people he called, learned there had been two Gengler homes previously in the village, one was no longer in existence, the other he would show me. He took me the short distance to it, it was now occupied by a lone woman and the front room was now made into a small store. The houses here were all joined together, some on each side of the narrow street. He explained to the lady why we were there, I was seeking the home of my maternal grandparents (who died before I was born). They emigrated to America after marriage here, and having two children born in Luxembourg. The lady of the house was very gracious, but spoke no English. I bought some cards and an apple from her, thanked her, and we left. I thanked Father Paul-Marie Meier, offered him some money for his trouble, but he refused it. I asked him if I could walk up the escarpment to the old fortress above, he showed me the way to the upward path. I left my name and address, in Saudi, also gave him my brother Steve's name, in Illinois, because he stated that he would look in old church records in Luxembourg City and might find more about the Gengler name there, with dates of marriage, etc. Mail sent to me in Saudi, is not always reliable. I took a picture of him standing in front of the house, before we left, though the sky was leaden grey.

I walked back to the hotel, after climbing the path and viewing the ruins of the fortress and castle, obtaining a beautiful view of the village below. Passing the little post office, I went in, wrote on the cards I had purchased and mailed them. At the hotel I told the proprietor of my luck in finding the Gengler house, with the aid of the pastor, and ordered lunch. I told him I would then take the bus back to Ettlebruk, and the train to Luxembourg City. The sun was trying to come out from clouds, as I sat in the lovely dining room and enjoyed the food. The proprietor and his wife were gracious, and pleasant, I enjoyed my brief visit here. My lunch consisted of creamed chicken on a flaky biscuit, potatoes, vegetable and a glass of Luxembourger white wine. The waiter served me graciously, food was wheeled to my table on a serving cart, wine was poured properly, everything was superb – and I had found the ancestral home I sought in Esch sur Sure. I surely am glad I came here – I could have taken a 3 day bus trip from Frankfurt to Paris, but it would have been a hassle going through the departure area at Mainz – this was much more peaceful.

I had an hour to relax here, pay my bill, then head for the bus that would stop at the crossroads, where I was let off. It was daytime now though, not dark as when I arrived, and walked alone to the hotel. It seems, though not intentional, as I have made a pilgrimage here, to the village of my ancestors, and it has been gratifying. As I left the hotel, the proprietor, his wife and young child, were in the front part of the building visiting with a friend. I could hear the Luxembourg language flowing freely, as I used to hear it between my mom, and her older cousins who also were from this area. May the waters of the river Sure keep flowing more hundreds of years!

Later: As I was standing at the crossroads near the tunnel, where the bus left me off, and waiting for the appointed time for the bus to arrive for the return to Ettlebruk, a man

approached, walking briskly with a walking stick in one hand and the leash for his Airdale dog on the other hand. He greeted me - it was the pastor, Fr. Paul-Marie Meier. I told him I was waiting for the bus to Ettlebruk. He immediately told me to stay right there, not get on the bus if it came, he would get his car and take me to Ettlebruk, 19 miles away. I thanked him, said that was not necessary, but he insisted, walked briskly on and was back in a short time, with the car. I got in, it was like a small station wagon, the dog was in the back part, and we rode on. I offered him the money I was holding in my hand, for bus fare, a 50 franc bill, but he absolutely refused any money, said he was glad I found my ancestors' village. He dropped me off at the train station, said "auf weidersehn", wished me a good trip home. Wasn't that nice, more Luxembourg hospitality. We were always taught, as children, to be helpful and hospitable. I rode the train back into Luxembourg City, it was full of children just out of school, commuting to the villages that we passed through. One next to me was reading an English book. I asked if they learned the English language, he said they learn German, French and English, Luxembourg language is sort of a different dialect, based on German, they pick it up by use in the family.

When reaching Luxembourg City train depot, I decided to travel either to Paris or Belgium. I had money that was used in Belgium, would have to change money if I went to Paris, so for now, decided on Brussels, bought a ticket . I'll get to Paris another time.

Irma Kackert Age 65

Second Trip to Esch sur Sure – August 1982

I was still working at Al Hada hospital in Saudi Arabia, enjoying the work and also the many camping weekends with friends I have made here. We have formed the “Adventure Club”, all like to hike the mountains, explore the country, spend time diving and snorkeling in the Red Sea, a group of about 16 people, mainly Americans working here, but also some from Europe and England. My second post-leave time was here, I was going to U.S.A. to attend the wedding of my granddaughter Ruth, on the way planned to stop in Europe, and visit Esch sur Sure again. Before I left, I had to renew my contract at Al Hada, and did not want to accept the usual two year contract they asked for, but for a shorter time. When I came here in 1980 all administrative offices were handled by American personnel, but now Saudi military personnel were slowly taking over some spots. I had a very difficult time with Major Mohammed Rafae, but Doctors convinced him I was needed to do the hydrotherapy work and he finally granted the visa and my terms of contract. Following is my journal of this trip.

SATURDAY JULY 31

Last day of the month, and last day of work! I slept so good, awoke at 6:00 a.m., didn't go out for my usual early swim because I had a chore to do before leaving for work. I had brought a large shell (with the animal in it) from the beach last week, it had soaked in chlorine water, and most of the animal was out now, but I had to tend to it again, to make sure all was gone, didn't want to leave any smelly shell here while I'm away. I had emptied all food from the refrigerator in preparation to leaving. From Al Hada compound, where I lived, I had to take a bus into Taif, about 10 kilometers away, to the Al Hada Rehabilitation Center, where I was now working. Had a very busy, routine morning, giving treatment to three patients, in the Hubbard tanks. In afternoons I was in the exercise pool with individual patients, moving their arms and legs in the water as they lay on the tray. I did Sultan and Eidah, the little boys, and next a female out patient. I enjoy my work, and it produces such good results. I left work at 3:15 p.m., carrying letters for the United States from other employees, will mail them in U.S. We all do this for each other. When arriving at Al Hada compound, I taught the swim classes for Recreation Department for an hour, then collected everything for my trip, hurriedly, for I needed to be ready when George and Marie Swan came (their girls would remain here with friends), to drive me to the airport in Jedda. That is a 2 ½ hour drive. Pat had offered to drive, if the suburban auto was back from repair, but he rode with us.

Arriving in Jedda, we all went to the new International market, they shopped for food and other supplies, we walked around, noting the very modern shops. There was nothing like this, when I came here. There were many black-veiled women about, walking with their husbands who wore the usual white thaube and red checked gutra. I have become very familiar with their clothing, the normal garb, won't see this type of clothing for a while, when I am away from the Far East. At 10:15 p.m. we left the shopping area and went to the airport. They accompanied me to the Lufthansa counter, making sure my reservation was o.k., and all my bags were checked. I carried the small leather bag on board. We had time for a cup of coffee together, then they saw me to the emigration security area, everyone got hugs, and we parted. These friends are just like family. As I awaited boarding, I met more friends, the Dr. Shern family, who are leaving for San Francisco. We will be flying to

Frankfurt, where plane changes occur. We departed at 1:05 a.m., I slept for a little while. Before landing, we were served a meal, a chicken sandwich on Arab bread, fruit, white wine, which is served gratis on international flights.

SUNDAY AUGUST 1

Arrival at Frankfurt was at 6:00 a.m., the sky was leaden grey, it had rained a little. I collected my bags o.k. from the carousel, then changed the heavy brass mortar and pestle (found abandoned in the desert), from my carry-on, to a suitcase, and checked 2 cases. I tried to get a plane flight to Luxembourg City, but no seats were available, so purchased a train ticket. The trip involved 2 changes, one at Mainz, also at Koblenz, which was a hassle, but a German couple near me, who spoke English were very helpful in guiding me. I bought them coffee on the train, also gave him a 2 Saudi Riyal note, he had never seen any money from that country.

The train took me to Luxembourg City arriving at 5:00 p.m., I enjoyed seeing the beautiful countryside, so different than the sandy desert where I was living. We passed farming country, with rolling hills, trees and bushes. The yellow fields of grain looked to be ready for harvesting. There were cattle in some pastures, all in all, a country that produced it's food, in Saudi most foods are imported, there are no factories. Having been in Luxembourg City (the capitol) once before, I was familiar with it, took the next train to Ettlebruk. Arriving there, found there was no connecting bus today to Esch sur Sure, because it was Sunday. I would have to wait until tomorrow at 8:00 a.m. I saw a hotel sign right across from the train station, went over, found the door locked and a sign on it "Open at 6:00 p.m.". So I sat on the doorstep for 45 minutes, until Mme. Comes, the owner, opened the door. I took a room, showered, and was dressing when I heard the church bell ring, so presumed there was a mass at 7:00 p.m. I walked to the church, saw people going in, and heard mass in Luxembourg language. What good timing!! This is the first opportunity for me to hear mass, since Easter Monday, when a priest came to Taif, mass is said secretly there on various occasions. Afterward I walked a little bit, then entered a café just across from the hotel and had a German meal, wurst, potato salad, roll and beer. It was very good, I then went to my room, washed a couple of items of clothing, got ready for bed. How lucky I am to travel, I do enjoy it.

MONDAY AUGUST 2

Awoke to a foggy sky, after sleeping well all night under the big comforter on the bed. I felt stiff, from lack of exercise, so did 10 minutes stretching before getting dressed – I need exercise!!! Breakfast was provided, rolls, cheese, toast, honey, jam and coffee. From the hotel I tried to call the Lufthansa office, but got no answer, wanted to see if I could get a plane from Luxembourg City to Frankfurt. I'll have to take the train again. I paid my bill of 920 francs, walked to the station and got the 8:00 a.m. bus to Esch sur Sure. A young woman was waiting for it too, so I followed her, the ticket was 59 francs. The countryside here is beautiful with rolling hills and rectangles of cleared land for agriculture. There are dense forests with pine and deciduous trees, my mother often talked of how my grandfather told of walking through these forests, enjoying nature. I really enjoyed the bus ride, for when I came here before in November 1980, there was some snow on the ground, now it is warm

and flowers bloom in window boxes, and along driveways. I see red geraniums, lavender and purple phlox and white sweet alyssum in the plantings, flowers all over!. There are neat little gardens next to houses in the villages, and I see people picking spinach, lettuce, tomatoes, leek, onions, to take to the market.

Arriving in Esch sur Sure, I knew my way now to the church, went there and met Fr. Paul-Marie Meier at the rectory. He must have seen me coming, as I went through the gate, opened the door and welcomed me, said he had received my letter from Saudi, on Friday,. We had a very pleasant visit in his office, I presented him with a large white razor coral, which I had brought up from the Red Sea on one of my dives there. He appreciated that, said it would go on a special shelf for viewing. He had procured information about my maternal grandparents, from the church archives in Luxembourg City, as he had said he would do. Frederick Gengler was born in Esch sur Sure in 1830, his wife was also born there, they were married in the church here (the one standing now) in 1863, emigrated to the U.S., Aurora, Illinois, in 1867 with two children born in Esch sur Sure. I knew from my mother, they had 10 more children born in Aurora, my mother was the second youngest. Frederick Gengler was a tailor, had a business in downtown Aurora, to support his family.

Now he took me into the church, and I took pictures of the altar, where my grandparents were married, he said it is exactly the same as when it was built, no changes have been made, it has always been maintained well. The baptismal font, a marble bowl on a pillar, had the date 1803 engraved on it, is still used in baptisms. The first two Gengler children, Timothy and Mary were baptized from that font, and I photographed it. After the church, Fr. drove me to the cemetery, we walked around and he showed me several Gengler tombstones, also one with the name Heinen, this family was related and also some came to Aurora, Illinois. At one side of the cemetery there were 5 huge Linden trees, bordering the edge, he told me they are probably 200 years old, have been preserved by putting iron braces and a special cement in areas of the trunk, that had split. The trees are treasured by the people. My grandfather planted a Linden tree in the front yard of the house had had built in Aurora, where I was born and grew up, I played under it many times, he probably did this because they grew in his village of Esch sur Sure.

There is a large dam on the river Sur, above the village a few miles, he drove me there to view the area, told me it provides electrical power, and also drinking water (which is purified). A large portion of the reservoir, called a barrage, is used in summer for boating, fishing, and water sports, many people come and camp, for the area is beautiful and weather is warm. He stopped at special viewing places, also took me to the little chapel and statue of Saint Katarine. This was placed on a hill overlooking the old castle, by the local people many years ago, in thanks for a miraculous cure of breast cancer in a woman. It remains today, just as it was built. Fr. Paul-Marie presented me with several booklets, written by him in French, German, Luxembourg and English, on the history of this area. He did this for the community, celebrating an anniversary, the information goes back to year 970 A D. He is a very educated man, I was very fortunate to have him escort me around, and tell me historical facts.

After this wonderful morning of sightseeing, Fr. drove me to the Beau Site Hotel, just over the bridge in Esch sur Sure, and across the river from the hotel where I stayed when I was

here in November 1980. He secured a room for me from the owner, whom he knew, and that was very nice for the hotel rooms are at a premium here in summer, many tourists come to enjoy the castle ruins and other fortifications. The hotel is a very old building, very nice and clean, and right on the river Sur. In keeping with being built long ago, the key to my room was a very big, iron, old fashioned one. Speaking of keys, when Fr. Paul-Marie took me to the cemetery, which was on a hill outside of town, he opened the stone chapel there. It had huge wooden doors and the key was at least 6 inches long, very old and unchanged. Inside the chapel were life size statues of the crucifixion scene, Christ and the two thieves. Before a burial the body is brought from church, into this chapel, and prayers are said over it. The plain wood trestle where the coffin is placed, is the same one used since the chapel was built, Fr. had all this information. My great-grandparents are probably buried here, there were some very old grave markers which had been removed from graves and stood against the outside walls of the chapel, we looked for names but they were indistinguishable, due to age and weathering.

I love the great outdoors, mountains, trees, rivers and lakes – maybe I inherit that from my forebears who lived in this beautiful place. Fr. Paul-Marie drove me back to my hotel, I changed into walking shorts and cool top and walked the path up into the deep woods on the mountain behind the village. It was beautiful, so cool and green, there were wild raspberry bushes all over, and I broke off a piece to carry home, and give to my cousin Catherine Poole, she wanted something from her grandmother's birthplace. I am sure this area in the forest is just the same as it was when my grandfather walked on this mountain, my mother told me stories that he would tell her about the area. On returning to the village, I bought some items from a shop (there were not many) as souvenirs of Luxembourg, decals, printed head scarves, T-shirts and coasters to put under glasses. At the post office I wrote post cards, and mailed them.

I went to the old Gengler house, which Fr. had found for me on my last visit, it is occupied by a Mme. Leas and her name is inscribed on the front glass, since she uses it as a small store. I bought a small bottle of wine from her, and as she does not speak English, I asked a young man and girl standing outside her place, to translate for me. I found that she was a widow, and her mother-in-law had been a Gengler. A man at a house across the narrow street was throwing small wood into a little area, (winter fuel) and overheard our conversations. He also spoke English, told me that this was the Gengler house, the name used to be visible, inscribed on the sandstone piece above the doorway, but was now weathered away. As I spoke with him, he looked to me just like young men in the Bohr family, who were classmates of mine in St. Nicholas school, in Aurora – those families were descended from Luxembourg people also. The young interpreter took a picture of Mme. Leas and myself, in the doorway.

Going back to the hotel I noted some small guests playing, in bathing suits, with small boats, were trying to make a bridge across the narrow river. There were stone steps here leading into the water. I put on a bathing suit, sat on the steps a little while as I watched them, then took a swim. The water was frigid!!, it chilled me in a short time, but I'm glad I went in, now I swam in the river Sur. My mother used to often say that the slight limp my grandfather Gengler had, was blamed on the cold water when he would swim in it. Maybe that was not the cause, but in the 1800's medical knowledge was sparse. I took a hot

shower, and dressed. I had invited Fr. Paul-Marie to dine with me, at the hotel, and he arrived at 7:00 p.m., I wanted to repay him in some way for his courtesy. The hotel owner, an older woman who knew Fr. Paul-Marie, was pleased that he came to dine, and served us Luxembourg white wine as we sat on the veranda overlooking the river. He told me that he had phoned the ladies living in Luxembourg City, whom Catherine Poole had written to for many years from America, but they had never met, and had asked me to take a picture of them for her. He knew them slightly, for they taught at the school where he formerly was pastor. Margaret Schroeder, the older of the two sisters, replied on the phone that she would be delighted to meet me, a cousin of her pen pal in America. We had a very good dinner in the lovely dining room, then Fr. left and I retired

TUESDAY AUGUST 3

I slept well, awoke at 7:00 a.m. as the church bells were ringing, what a nice sound!! I jumped up, dressed quickly, left the hotel and hoped I would be on time for morning mass. As I walked along the village street, with no one in sight, unchanged in many years, the second ringing of the bells pealed out. Now I knew this was the old custom which I would hear in my childhood, a first church bell, then the second one 10 minutes before mass was to begin, it is still carried on here. I entered the church through the old heavy doors (which Fr. had told me were unchanged since my grandparent's time) and I was the only one there, except Fr. Paul-Marie. He was ready to garb in the vestments for mass. Very soon more parishioners entered, there were about 10 who came. The mass was said in Luxembourg language, and I tried to recognize some words, but managed very few. I did enjoy being there, and hearing the strong voices of the men and women in attendance as they sang, I also received the holy Eucharist. There are 9 statues of angels surrounding the altar, which Fr. said were there when my parents were married, now they look down on me, and I gave thanks for my life.

After mass Fr. told me that he had to drive into Luxembourg City today to meet with the Bishop of the diocese, either I could remain in Esch sur Sure today and he would take me Ettlebruk this evening, to get a train, or I could ride to Luxembourg City with him and his secretary, this morning. I chose to do the latter, I needed to leave Luxembourg City tonight I returned to the hotel, had breakfast, packed my bag and paid my bill. I was ready when Fr. and the secretary drove up. We rode through the lovely countryside and small villages, I noted everything there was neat and clean, not a scrap of paper anywhere, some ladies were sweeping the gutter in front of their houses. What a contrast to where I am living now, desert winds blow everything around.

Fr. Paul-Marie dropped the secretary off at the bishop's residence, then drove me to the home of the Schroeder sisters, Margaret, age 83 and Marie, age 80. What a coincidence that Fr. had known these ladies whom I was seeking. They received me graciously, were very happy to meet a relative of the American pen pal, and insisted that I stay and spend the day with them instead of just taking their photograph, for pen pal Catherine Poole in America. So, Fr. drove on and I stayed, I would leave Luxembourg City tonight on the train to Frankfurt. They were very happy, said this was a special day, meeting a guest from America, and brought out a bottle of champagne, emphasized that it was made in Luxemburg, not France. They brought out crystal wine glasses, I took a picture of this

elegant lady, Margaret, opening the bottle, a folded towel wrapped around it properly, and pouring, as Marie held the three glasses. They both spoke excellent English, and we conversed and became acquainted, as we sipped. They wanted to know much about my life and family in America, also about my present occupation in the Al Hada hospital in Saudi Arabia. They reminded me, in their speech, of my own mother, and the tales she had heard of Luxembourg from her parents. In a few hours they prepared a dinner of pork chops, cooked carrots, parsley potatoes, fresh cucumber, coffee and chocolate cream tarts. I helped a bit, preparing the vegetables, protested when they insisted that we eat in the dining room, the table set with linen cloths and napkins, crystal, and best silverware. This was extra work for them, but they said again, this was such a special treat for them. A bottle of red wine was served with the dinner, again, done on only a special occasion. I was amazed at being treated so well, by these ladies whom I had never known. Margaret told me how she, and her sister, were teachers in school during the World War, told of the bombings by the Germans, and occupation by them of Luxembourg. German soldiers came to their door, gave them papers to sign which would make them under Germany. She resented this, and took her pupils often to the American military cemetery, put flowers on graves of American servicemen. A picture of that was printed in a Wisconsin newspaper, my cousin saw it, wrote to Margaret Schroeder, thanking her for doing something for deceased American soldiers. That is how the pen pal letters started, many years ago. Franklin Roosevelt and the British leaders were very helpful in declaring that Luxemburg remain a free country, and these ladies appreciated America.

Following the dinner, they told me to lie down on a sofa for a short time, to rest, then they would drive me to the American Military cemetery in Luxembourg City, the leader General Patton, is buried there also. I appreciated this very much. Marie was the driver (they both had put on hats and white gloves), and Margaret sat beside her, was the navigator, they helped each other watching traffic. The car was kept in the garage, which was under the house. It was an interesting drive, Margaret telling Marie when the intersection was clear, saying "rhode" (red) or "grene" (green) when stoplights changed, and choosing side streets without much traffic. We made the trip safely, though it was a bit scary, they got the car safely back into the garage, and locked all doors down there, then we ascended to the living quarters. Margaret called the taxi company for me, ordering a cab to come in 2 hours, and take me to the train station. They served me a chicken sandwich, pickles and coffee, as we rested and discussed this day, and my cousin in America. I took the cab (Margaret was insisting she pay the driver, but I refused), thanking them both for such a wonderful day, and their true Luxembourg hospitality. At the station I boarded a "thru" train for Frankfurt airport, was alone in first class compartment, and slept most of the way on the 5 ½ hour trip. Farewell to friends made in Esch-sur-Sure and Luxembourg City.

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 4

Before I left Frankfurt I made a phone call to friend Rolf Weiderman, who had been working in Saudi and was a member of our camping group, reached him as he was preparing to go to work. He had finished his contract, and come back to his home in Frankfurt. We had a nice conversation, was sorry we could not get together, but I had to catch a plane in a short time. He and a couple of other young German men had always been so kind to me, escorted me, would dance with me in the compounds (I was old enough to be their mother,

and I called them “my boys”) gave me rides, as no woman could drive a car. They helped me with the diving gear also. I always feel very much at home in Frankfurt airport, have passed through so often, on trips into Europe, or going home on annual leave. I went to the TWA desk and organized my return flight from America to Saudi – had tried to do this before I left Taif, but things are not easy to accomplish in Saudi, then went to Lufthansa desk and checked in for flight to Chicago.

These are long flights, over the Atlantic, but I slept part of the time, was comfortable, arrived safely in the morning. Going through customs in O’Hare airport, in Chicago, was a hassle, had to answer a lot of questions, open one bag, make out the declaration statement for customs department, and the attendant was about to make me open the red bag, but I said I had a connecting flight to catch, then he said “all right, go through”. The Lufthansa agent then took my luggage and checked it on United Airlines, for the flight to Kansas City. I had a short layover here, called my brother Steve in Des Plaines, which is a short distance from O’Hare. I visited with Frances, his wife, also, and then he drove to the airport for a quick visit, before my next flight. Steve looks good, is feeling well, we don’t see each other very often, since I live in California. I told him I was en route to Kansas, to visit my daughter Judy and family, and attend the wedding there.

On arrival in Kansas City, there were violent thunderstorms and lightening, the flights were delayed for 3 hours, finally we took off and Judy and Jerry met me at the terminal in Salina, Kansas. I was extremely tired, it was about 11:30 p.m., and we didn’t visit long, for I needed to go to bed. I was glad for reunion with my family, being out of the country for several years.

THURSDAY AND FRIDAY AUGUST 5 and 6

Judy and Jerry live just outside of town, on a small acreage, and have been raising dairy goats, something they have enjoyed, at present they have 20. Their children grew up here, Jerry has had a job in town, and also does farm chores. Now the oldest girl was being married, after finishing college. My son and 2 grandchildren, who live in California, were flying here, to attend, and it would be a reunion for all of us, he lives in the northern part of California; I live in the southern area. The local county fair was going on at this time, and Alice and John had animals entered, so they had to be driven there to care for them each day, it was a busy time. Alice took many ribbons on her sheep, and goats, then even won the “Best of Show” award. The weather was hot, and humid, but we were happy, I went to the fair on Friday morning.

SUNDAY AUGUST 9

Joe, the groom, had invited his good friend Benny, from Switzerland to be best man, and 2 Chinese friends from college days, as guests, so it was an international gathering, all very friendly and happy to be together. The young male guests slept outside in the camper. The wedding on Saturday was in the chapel at Marymount College, Judy’s alma mater, the bride radiant in white gown and veil, her sisters were attendants. After a reception, the young couple left on a honeymoon trip. It was great that I could arrange my trip to U.S.at

this time, attend the family gathering here, and have a short time at my home, before returning to employment in Saudi Arabia.

MONDAY AUGUST 10

This was departure day, my son and children flew, together with me, on Frontier Airlines, to Denver, which gave us more time to be together, we changed planes there, they flew to Sacramento, California, I went on to Los Angeles. My time at my home in Thousand Oaks was short, as I had many things to take care of, including 1981 income tax. My daughter Mary, who lives close to me, oversees affairs for me, when I'm out of the country, it was a happy reunion for us, I also had brief visits with a few of my friends. On the following Sunday, son Tom flew his plane down from Chico, his home, landed at Camarillo airport, 7 miles from my home. He then flew me back to Chico, to see the different house he now has., I spent 2 days there with the family and on Wednesday, flew me back to Camarillo. On Thursday I had to depart U.S., flew from LAX to London, on TWA airlines, transferred there to British Airways plane, and took off for Jedda, Saudi Arabia, and back to work doing Hydrotherapy at Al Hada hospital in Taif.

Irma M. Kackert Age 67 in 1982

Typed on computer by Irma in October 2004