

Where's My Pretzel?

By Ron Bauman

May 6, 2024

My head was throbbing, and my mouth was dry with musty breath. I looked around at the dark room and listened to my husband, Phil, snore louder than the streetcar that just went by. I reached for my phone, and it said:

1:24 A.M. LOCAL

7:24 P.M. HOME

I headed to the washroom and was hit with a devilish odor. My jeans were draped over the shower door, soaked in water with dirt encrusted on the backside. The scene of cigarette smoke and beer radiated from the fabric.

Neither of us smoke, so how do they smell of cigarettes? I wondered this before turning to the mirror. My face is ragged, and I look like I crawled out from under a dank bar. My stomach gurgles. *When was the last time I ate?* I sank onto the toilet and tried to piece together the night, watching the only pair of jeans I brought on this trip dangle before me.

We were on our honeymoon - a sixteen-day train trip to five countries in Europe. Munich was our second stop. We were influenced by our love of the film *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. Phil and I scouted the filming sites as part of our visit, but timing worked out that we would see the world-famous Oktoberfest as well. I grew up having visited the second-largest Oktoberfest in Kitchener-Waterloo. Bragging to my family during the holidays about our visit would be as delicious as the forthcoming beer, pretzels and chocolates.

Before heading to Theresienwiese, the festival grounds, we walked around the Englischer Garten and stopped at a bakery for a sandwich. The night before we visited the filming sites of *Willy Wonka*, and we thought we were well prepared to participate at Oktoberfest. The plan was to walk the festival, ride a couple rides and visit one festival hall. Of course, no trip to Germany is complete without some traditional Bavarian foods like pretzels and bratwurst. I reminded my husband that we were to go to Austria the next day. The festival closes at 9 p.m. (3 p.m. at home), so we should not have any issues.

After riding the Olympia Looping roller coaster and buying our shot glass souvenir, we entered Löwenbräu-Festzelt, one of the largest halls. The interior was decked out in blue and white bunting, flowers hanging from wooden chandeliers, and a giant bandstand in the centre. Without reservations arranged, we could not sit at a table. We stood next to a group

of English-speaking twentysomethings, all from Oregon and dressed in lederhosen and dirndls, who connected us with their waitress, Maria.

Maria stood tall at 5-feet-7-inches, had a petite frame but carried at least 30 steins at once. I could barely hold mine up, which caused me to drink faster. The Festzelt was thriving with the band keeping dictating the energy of the room. When they belted out “Living on a Prayer” by Jon Bon Jovi, the entire hall stood up and stomped their feet on the tables. I studied the crowds wild embrace of the rhythm.

I was enraptured by two hunky local men, plaid shirts open, walking from table-to-table to take up any leftover steins they could find. The two looked like Zack Morris and A.C. Slater going on a boy’s trip. Their shirts slowly started to unbutton, using their handsome wiles to get their way.

Onto our second Bull stein, Maria was unable to fulfill my request for some food. We were not a table, so we could not eat. The Oregonians did not pause to help me out and I felt like I should stay and enjoy the world we stomped our way into.

The music played and we swayed. The Oregonians were keeping us entertained and the two hunks were now edging closer to our table, hunting for both food and drink. As I tried to slow down my consumption so I could keep pace with Phil throughout the evening, I could feel the two litres of beer swirling in my stomach. Phil was not one to leave a party and asking for water in Europe yields a confused, offended look from the service team. Maria, instead, brought our third stein.

I took a couple of sips before turning to Phil, head swirling and cloudiness coming over me, to say I needed some air. The blues, whites and greens of the room spun around me, just as I took three steps towards the door.

SPLAT – my sandwich and two beers evacuated my system and onto the floor. Next to mee was one of the hunks also keeling over while his friend patted his back. We were escorted out and thrown into the alleyway. I sat on a dirt path, littered with cigarette butts, and was in and out of moments where passersby asking if I needed help. I tried to come to a consciousness that would help me get in touch with Phil, who was still in the Festzelt. My phone read:

7:27 P.M. LOCAL
1:27 P.M. HOME

A notification from Facebook showed Phil was going live. I could not open the phone to see him twirling around the hall. But as I sat on the toilet as I remembered the night, the video showed he was leaving the hall and talking about how I was lost.

My rescue came in the form of an angel named Katherine. She had a short brown bob haircut, plump cheeks and was wearing a leather jacket over her dirndl. She knelt next to me and the streetlamp above her head gave a halo effect. She asked if I needed help getting up. I remember handing her my phone as it buzzed, with “HANDSOME HUSBAND” across my screen. She spoke with Phil but could hear him over the yelling of some tourist around the corner. She stood up and looked around, then dragged me not 50 feet to Phil spinning around a lamppost. It was now

8:12 P.M. LOCAL

2:12 P.M. HOME

After that, I had no idea how we got back to our hotel. My stomach angrily complained how empty it was, but I needed more sleep. I threw my jeans into a plastic bin liner and covered it with towels to dampen the smell. My alarm was somehow set to wake up in five hours and twenty-one minutes.

6:33 A.M. LOCAL

12:33 A.M. HOME

That morning we rolled out of bed, not as bad as we had expected. Phil knew nothing of getting back to our hotel, but was ready to visit Salzburg and do *The Sound of Music Tour*. The front desk attendant was leaving his shift. I nodded good morning and showed a face of shock.

“How are you even awake? Most people as drunk as you sleep the rest of the day?” he said, handing us two bottles of flat water. He also let us know that we were walked into the hotel by a kind woman with short hair. He also thanked me the two pretzels as a reward for helping get us to our room. My stomach growl while Phil chugged back his water.