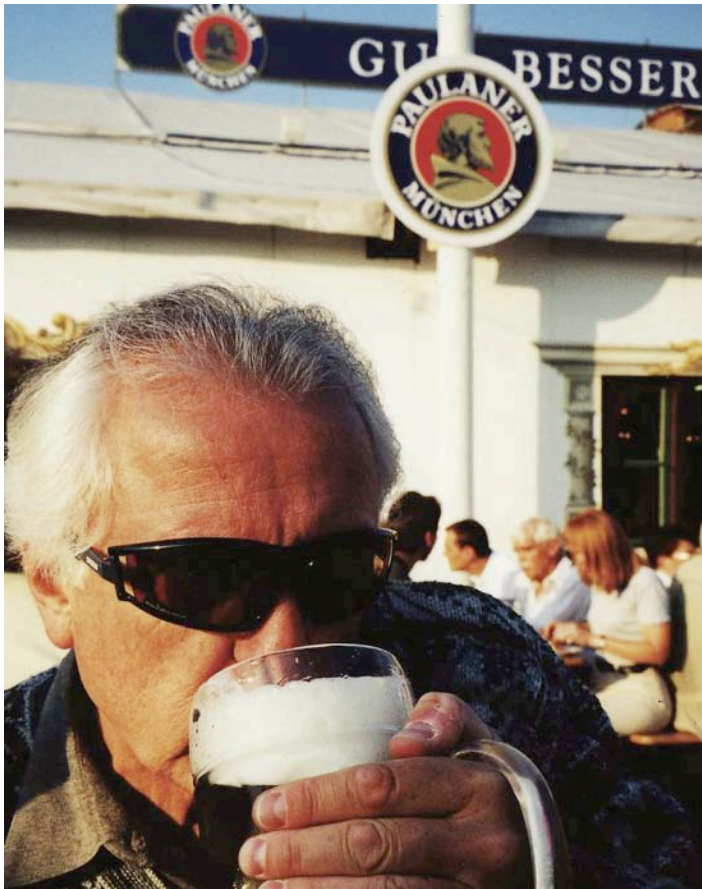


There is no Party Quite Like the Oktoberfest!

By Linda U. Foley



Al Foley's got the shades and the beer; life is good

Photo Linda U. Foley

Loneliness is not a word that comes to mind when you are partying with 7.1 million 'friends' at the Oktoberfest in Munich. The 183-year old tradition commemorates the wedding of Bavaria's King Ludwig I to Princess Theresie of Saxony-Hildburghausen. The location for the Oktoberfest has henceforth been called Theresien Wiese (Theresie's Field) or in local lingo, Die Wies'n. The event usually lasts 16 days but in 2000—the year of our visit—the celebrations were extended by two holidays celebrating Germany's 10-year reunification.

September 15, opening day, dawned and drizzled but hardly dampened our spirits. Our relatives were game to tackle this event with us even though many native Muenchners shun it like many New Yorkers do the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. My cousins dressed in traditional garb—Dirndl and Loden wear (water-resistant material made from sheep wool usually died a blue green color). Passengers on the S-Bahn—even non-natives—also dressed in traditional clothing; the men wearing heavily silver-embroidered leather vests, velvet-trimmed jackets, cable knit and tasseled knee-high socks, Lederhosen (leather pants), and Knickerbockers (usually corduroy pants) suspenders trimmed with deer horn, and Haverl shoes, traditional footwear. The women attired in embroidered cotton blouses, voluminous wool skirts, lace petticoats, and colorful shawls. Languages spanning the globe and various German dialects floated into the overcast morning.

My cousin knew in advance the route which the 'Parade of Landlords'—brewery owners—would take and which of the many huge beer halls had been selected for the opening ceremony. Considering the enormous crowd, such strategic planning was extremely helpful. The tent, Schottenhammel Festhalle, has a seating capacity of 9,500 and is always popular with celebrities. Seating reservations must be made months in advance—there is no random seating throughout the duration of the Oktoberfest. Here, promptly at noon, a ceremonial de-cogging of a huge keg—usually performed by the mayor—would signal the official start of the party. In that particular year of 2000, Buergermeister Christian Ude predicted that he would need no more than two huge swings with the hammer to send the cog flying and the beer flowing. It is said that reelection hinges upon this rite should the mayor need more than two tries. Bavarians take their beer and masculinity seriously.

Punctually, the Parade appeared with approximately 1000 participants

of historically attired dancers, costumed performers, a Rifleman's Procession and an impressive stately group of wealthy beer hall landlords.

The horse-drawn carriages were brimming with heavy, vibrant flower garlands, cheerful Stein-swinging politicians, carolers, children, celebrities, brass bands. Gorgeous horses, tails brushed to shine like rushing rivers flowing along their gleaming gams, hammered silver harnesses jingling, conjuring images of beer commercials of Clydesdales in the snow. A drizzle started. We found ourselves surrounded by umbrellas opening like wings of black crows, then closing like an apology...still the spirits remained un-dampened.

Through the forest of assorted heads and raingear, I could see the huge rotisserie of the 'Ochsenbraterei' and enormous oxen turning and browning lazily, just one of perhaps 85 consumed each day. Directly across from us, the 'Fischer Vronie' beer hall, a favorite for families, emitted the mouth-watering smell only woodchip-grilled fish can produce. There were 14 beer halls in all with a total seating capacity of 100,000. Each hall pours its own particular beer, has its own brand of ambience, food and entertainment like yodeling, or performers cracking whips in exact precision to the beat of the music. Waitresses pride themselves of being able to carry up to 12 one-liter beer steins at once. Personal trainers not necessary.

At the close of the Parade, the body mass turned good-naturedly in the direction of Schottenhammel beer hall. The crowd was so dense, we could only hear the ceremony over the loudspeaker and were at last relieved to find that Ude's chances at reelection were secured and that the party was officially sanctioned to begin.

Though I expected to have a distorted recollection from my childhood, I was happy to find that my memories met accurately with reality. Just as I remembered, there were the breathtaking rides, families dressed in traditional Bavarian dress, little girls with braided hair like I had as a child, exuberant partiers singing, linking arms with friends and strangers alike and swaying to the music, all types of booths and, of course, the food.

Grilled, smoked trout on a stick, Leberkaese—hot crusted veal loaf—fragrant rye and wheat rolls stuffed with pickled herring drenched in onions and cloves, toasted, sugared almonds, huge decorated gingerbread hearts to hang around the neck, sumptuous salted, hot Laugen pretzels, Daikon-type white radishes sliced so thin as to resemble foam on a plate, grilled rotisserie chicken, every conceivable sausage with pungent sauerkraut curling over bread and rolls, pastries light as air, powdered sugar puffing into the breeze...

On the return ride in the S-Bahn, wedged between many other tired revelers, I leaned back thanking King Ludwig for his flair for throwing a great party and for making my personal memories a delectable reality.

Oktoberfest Vocabulary

Wies'n	Bavarian lingo for meadow; in this case referring specifically to the Oktoberfest location
Dirndl	Bavarian for young girl but most often referring to a style of dress comprised of an embroidered blouse with short puff sleeves, a tight fitting bodice closed in front with hammered silver buttons and cording, and a flowing skirt over many petticoats. Modern dirndl skirt versions are made of leather.
Mas'	Bavarian for one liter of beer
A Hoibe	Bavarian for one half liter; in high German it would be "Eine Halbe" but, Bavarians are very colorful and distinctive
A Busserl	in high German it would be "Ein Kuss" or a kiss. Lots of that going on at the Oktoberfest.
Herzertl	Herz in high German and in this case referring to the Gingerbread hearts decorated with every kind of endearment imaginable, to hang around your neck, usually purchased from one sweetheart for another
Brez'n	in high German, Bretze, meaning pretzel. These are distinctive, wonderful large Laugen pretzels, heavily salted. (Laugen is lye. One needs to try these before deciding it sounds unpalatable.)
Mandl'n	hot roasted sugared almonds, in a triangular bag
Fisch am Steck'n	my favorite; roasted crisp trout on a stick. Incredibly savory and wonderful.
Fischbroetla	luscious herring with loads of onions in a bakery-fresh roll
Huhn am Steck'n	deliciously crisp and flavored rotisserie chicken
Radi	large white radish, often sliced on the diagonal to pull apart like a fluffy accordian.

All foods are perfect accompaniments to enhance the consumption of rivers of beer and ribald camaraderie



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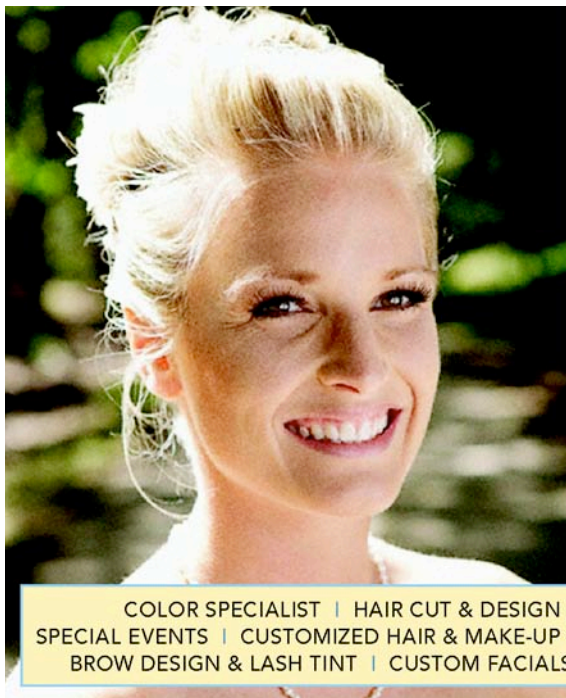
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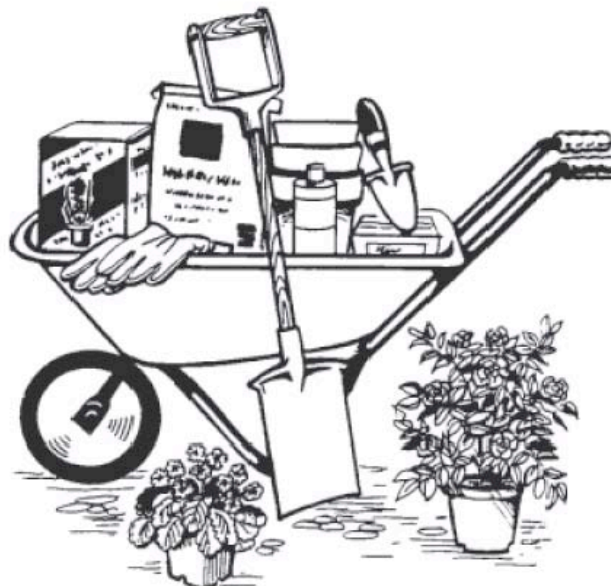
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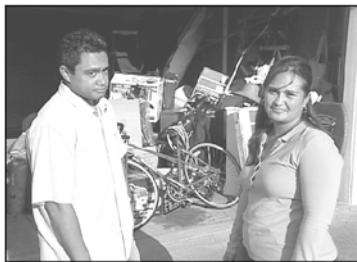


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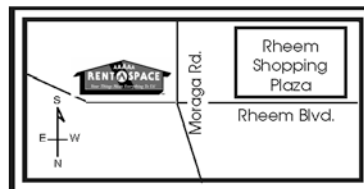
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