

By Dan Friesen

Back in the 90s, our early trips through Central Europe always started in Amsterdam, from where we worked our way through the BENELUX countries and along the Rhine, with a must-stop visit along the Romantic Road in Rothenburg, Germany.

Right off the Markt Platz is a fun little souvenir shop called “Anneliese Friese.” I developed an agreement with the owner, Anneliese, pictured below, and her son, Bernie, to pass the commission they would typically give to guides on to my travelers when they came shopping, using their nametags to claim the discount.

With a last name of Friesen, it was easy to develop a relationship with the Friese family over the years, and they shared with me that they had relatives in the States that passed through Ellis Island in the early 20th century.



Photo with Anneliese from my visit in 2005

As it happened, I led a group on the East Coast in the Fall of 1999. One of the most interesting stops along the way was the newly remodeled Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration, a fascinating series of displays about the nearly 100 million (of a total of 250 million, at that time) Americans who could trace their origins as US citizens to this port. On this particular visit, I noticed an old packing trunk on display with the name “FRIESE” clearly stamped on it. I took a photo and gave it to Anneliese on my next visit. She and

Bernie thought it quite a coincidence!

Our paths didn't cross again for several years. I was guiding other trips and our classic Alpine tour was not offered as frequently. This photo shared in this post was taken in 2005 when I stepped into the Anneliese Friese shop once again to ask if they would extend my commissions to my group as a discount.

Anneliese was there and when I asked her if she remembered me, she stared at me like she was seeing a ghost. Then she picked up the photo of the trunk I had given her years earlier and said "I had this on my desk at home last night and when I looked at it, I just felt like bringing it with me to the shop this morning...and here you are!!"

It was a serendipitous moment we both enjoyed immensely! It was a trans-Atlantic, cross-continental link over a period of generations that we were privileged to share! I haven't been back since but I heard that Anneliese passed away in 2017 and the shop is still run by her son, Bernie, and the rest of the family.

I was scheduled to be in Rothenburg this month with our Oberammergau Passion Play tour, which was, of course, canceled. We hope to be back again with other groups, perhaps in 2022 when the Play runs again, but if you ever have the chance to visit Rothenberg, remember my little story about cross-cultural connections across this amazing planet we share together!