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# *A Month Travelling With Mrs Hunt*

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## Chapter 4: Vienna

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### Saturday

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And so to Vienna. And the rediscovery of how easy it would be to live there again. It was a discovery that would not apply in Hong Kong's case, but more about that in Chapter 5.

On Saturday Graham got us to Geneva airport in plenty of time but unaccustomed as we were to lounges without announcements, we left our final attack on the route to the gate almost too late. I guess I knew, somewhere in the deeper recesses of my memory that some of the gates at Geneva airport are a *long* way from the main waiting area. We set off to walk to the gate a good 45 minutes before departure time, but arrived with barely 10 minutes to spare. We were flying on Austrian Air and, in typical Austrian fashion, they want you seated, buckled up, and no-more-talking, by then.

"Would the two remaining passengers for Austrian flight LX3562 to Vienna, Philip and Judith Hunt, please make your way to gate D45 as your flight is waiting for you, and all the Austrian people on board are ready to declare war on Switzerland unless you arrive now. Vielen Dank."

This while we were fast approaching the final security check. And, of course, they wanted us to remove our shoes. And all our loose change. And the metal fillings in our teeth.

As we emerged into the deserted gate lounge, an Austrian staffer asked if we were who we were and on receiving the confirming response, declared, "Well, you had better hurry."

A number of clever responses struggled below the surface of articulation as we hurried on board, our shoelaces still untied, whereupon we occupied seats 2A and 2C in the Canadair jet under the stern gaze of 48 seated, buckled up, and no-more-talking passengers.

I mean, how did they know whether we might not have had a tight connection? Or perhaps we were just two so very important people that Austrian airlines had to clear everyone else out of the gate lounge for security reasons. At least, dressed as we were in our American ski jackets, and me wearing a "Deer Valley" baseball cap, it was probable that America got the blame.

We had a nice lunch on the plane, but the Business Class option was prawns to which I am allergic. Judy gobbled them up with relish, or some other kind of appropriate sauce, and I opted for the inoffensive economy class sandwich. Around 1pm we disgorged from the airport and while we waited for our bags, purchased tickets on the express train to the city. The train station is under the airport terminal and we had to negotiate a set of stairs. Perhaps there was a lift, but we didn't see it. Manhandling the two big suitcases down the stairs was accomplished, but I was beginning to see the merit of smaller, if more numerous, suitcases. If I was coming to a conclusion about this, it would be utterly confirmed on the Hong Kong MTR later.

The express train terminates at Landstraße-Hauptstraße, which is not exactly the centre of the city. Technically we could catch the U-Bahn (the underground railway) and then walk a bit to the Hotel Papageno, but it seemed more sensible to find a taxi. We emerged into cold, wet Wien. The rain was light but bone-chilling. Fortunately the taxi rank was just on the other side of the intersection. A Nigerian (I'm guessing) driver in a Peugeot station wagon was first cab off the rank. Despite the voluminous appearance of his boot, he had his own luggage, a few groceries and boxes of pirate DVDs in there. Somehow, with much squeezing and slamming, everything fitted and within a few minutes he parked us over the road from the hotel.

The Hotel Papageno is about ten minutes walk from the Ring at the city end of Wiedner Hauptstraße. The number 1 tram runs right by the front door, and there is an U-Bahn station, Taubstummengasse (you had to ask), about 5 minutes walk through a hidden little square containing

a fountain and a statue of Mozart playing a flute while in deep embrace with some Mädchen. And a pizza parlour that never seemed to have any customers every time we walked past it. Maybe it was a front for something more sinister.



The young woman on reception was cheery and friendly in a way that seemed beyond the call of duty. How nice to be welcomed by somebody who enjoyed their work. She answered all our questions and sold us the three-day Vienna Card that gets you free public transport and a bunch of useful discounts. We bounced our suitcases up four steps to the lift which, in typical Austrian style, had been installed in the air space

encircled by the staircase. The staircase had been installed in the century before the lift, so the lift was made to size. And that size was 4 persons, or two persons with luggage. Provided you put all your carry-on luggage on top of your suitcases.

Our room on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor was flooded with light from big double-glazed doors that opened onto a small balcony framed in ornate wrought iron and supporting two flower baskets waiting for spring before being populated. A large wardrobe containing a small fridge (empty) and a safe sat next to a desk and chair, with a flat screen TV above. By the entrance was another door, with proper lever handles, that opened into a toilet in a room tiled to eye height. There was a double bed with enough room to walk around, with the usual European style single doonas folded side by side.

But the most dramatic feature of the room was the all-glass bathroom. In an attempt to create en suite rooms without making them seem cramped, the interior designers had created bathrooms out of one-third of the room space. And surrounded them with thick wall-to-ceiling glass, including the door. Given that our bathrooms at home, in the interest of privacy, actually have internal locks on the doors, this was, shall we say, a bit different. A curtain had been installed across the glass wall beside the bed, perhaps after comments from guests. Or maybe neighbours across the street.

Now that our lodging was secure we put on our waterproof ski jackets and walked down past Karlsplatz, down Kärtnerstraße and into the Graben where a large crowd were protesting about the transparency of bathrooms.



Our primary goal was to locate the little pizza restaurant by the horses. For a very large sum of money, tourists can get a ride around the streets of the 1<sup>st</sup> district in a horse-drawn carriage. We did it once when the Gowards visited, and probably paid for it. More commonly, we simply walked

past the horses in their marshalling area beside the Cathedral. And beside them was a pizza place we often patronised.

Alas, it was no more. A cafe of sorts occupied a space which might have been the place of our pizza parlour, but our plan to have dinner there that night had to be revised. A few metres behind the few horses waiting for passengers in the dismal weather, we found the lane that leads down to Figelmüller's, the renowned restaurant for authentic Wiener Schnitzel. It was, as ever, packed to the rafters, even at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

We noticed there was a sign to a second Figelmüller's sign-posted as 80 metres around the corner. Not really keen to jump straight into schnitzel that night, we nevertheless wandered around the corner and looked in the windows of an equally well patronised schnitzelhaus.

Our secondary mission for the afternoon was to buy a bandage for Mrs Hunt's leg. Regular readers may recall that this leg had been attacked by a bed in Phoenix, Arizona, a few days prior. The

wound appeared to be healing well, but the bandages supplied by the hospital had finally been used up. And leaving it uncovered caused the stitches to be irritated by her jeans. And avoiding irritation is one of my life goals, so we began to look for a Drogerie where we might buy the requisite first aid.

We passed a number of Apothekes (pharmacies) but they were all closed from Noon on Saturdays. But no Drogeries. After a few searched streets our secondary mission goal had become our primary one. By now we had retraced our steps back to Rotenturmstraße, the street that runs from St Stephen's Cathedral down to the canal, and spotted a large pizza place that was familiar and created some positive vibes, so we filed this discovery away for later consumption. Further down the street was the Comics shop where a young Richard had once found plenty to interest him.



And then we discovered a BIPA which is rather like Priceline at home. And inside BIPA, right down the back, we found bandages.

By now, lunch seemed a distant affair so we stopped in a busy and smoky coffee shop carrying notices that it served "the best coffee in Vienna." Admittedly, self-assessed.

There are no laws prohibiting smoking in restaurants and cafes in Vienna. I had forgotten how pleasant smoke-free dining is compared with the alternative. The coffee and hot chocolate was fine, and the waiter understood my German although later spoke to us in English.

"Let's go for a ride on the Ring Tram," I suggested. When we lived there, you could ride a tram that just circulated the Ringstrasse rather like the City Circle tram in Melbourne. Or perhaps one should say that the City Circle tram in Melbourne is like the Viennese one since the latter predates the former by most of a century.

So we set out again, past the 2<sup>nd</sup> Figelmüller's, for the Ring. We walked on past a row of illegally parked cars. A couple of police were measuring the distance between the cars and the other side of the road. Given that the street was marked "Parking Verboten" this seemed a redundant precaution, but this was Austria and what constituted a bookable violation was sometimes opaque to mere logic.

A man with a young teenage daughter stopped to question the police. His daughter stood a few metres behind and looked at him with the kind of hatred angst that only girls of that age can perfect.

Within a couple of minutes we were on the Ringstraße opposite the Stadtpark and spotting an old-style number 2 tram we got on board, sitting on the seat near the front that had the heater under it. Ooh that heat under your bum. Paradise. We might ride around twice.

We rattled and trundled along. Or the tram did. We just oozed down into the warmth. Past the Stadtpark on the left. Around the corner and up past the Opera. Past the Museums on one side and then the Parliament. We were just getting ready for our first sight of the Rathaus (town hall) when, to our surprise, the number 2 tram turned left. Apparently there isn't a tram that just goes round and round the Ring any more.

With our bums thawing, and the rain still drizzling outside we decided that a tram ride to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> district might be entertaining. It was not a route we used much when we lived here, so it was all a new adventure. The view was not remarkably different from a ride to the 18<sup>th</sup> district which we once patronised daily, but it felt very familiar. Comforting. Warm. Especially on the bottom.

We alighted at the terminus noting some other tourists types who had decided to stay on board for the return trip. We shivered at an alternate Strassenbahn Haltestelle (tram stop) and took a tram that went back to the Ring by a slightly different route bordered, as had been our outward journey by 18<sup>th</sup> century apartment blocks, shops, and the occasional church or small park.

We wandered back to the previously sighted pizza parlour in the fading light, bought a couple of slices of fairly ordinary pizza made more edible by two glasses of Chianti and slid into a booth by a

window looking out into the street. Some tourists gazed in at us, as if deciding whether to join the inside throng. I gave them a wave and a thumbs up and they laughed.

The streets around the Cathedral were full of people in the evening darkness. The entrance to the U-Bahn seemed a better alternative than the walk so we descended into the warmer and drier depths, found our way to our station and the exit to our hotel and its friendly glass-walled bathroom.

## Sunday

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While the flat screen TV showed us live snow-cams of the ski resorts accompanied by Tyrolean brass music, I consulted with Mrs Hunt about how best to use a Sunday in Vienna. Austria was still a Catholic country, by tradition more than attendance, and many shops were closed on the Lord's Day. We decided to use the following day, Monday, as the day to revisit our old haunts in the 18<sup>th</sup> district. I had always wanted to go to the Historical Art Museum to see the Bruegels and never got around to it when we lived here. So that was to be our morning mission today, then we might wander up to Mariahilferstrasse in the afternoon because (surely) the shops would be open there.

We dawdled over breakfast. There was plenty of choice in a nice light breakfast room beside the foyer. The other guests seemed a mixed bunch. No other Australians that we could tell by eavesdropping as we passed by tables. A couple of slim ladies wearing the same style glasses looked like sisters. Each day they occupied the table nearest the food.



The Museum, one of twin buildings built as part of the Ring, is a work of art itself. It is a phenomenally beautiful building inside. The central staircase and surrounding wall and ceiling art would grace any palace in the world. The museum restaurant was offering a champagne brunch for a mere 65 Euros a head. We demurred on the basis of the value equation.

Mrs Hunt and I wandered around the main Picture Gallery finally arriving at the room full of paintings by Bruegel (the Elder and the Younger, both). These are stunning and so full of detail one could look at them for hours and still find new delights. After a stopover in the Museum shop we made our way, just after midday to the U-Bahn for the one-stop ride to the middle of Mariahilferstrasse.

And, of course, all the shops were closed. Never mind. At least there was a McDonald's open serving decent coffee and even prawn cutlets for Mrs Hunt. We wandered back down the hill towards the city centre, still accompanied by plenty of other sightseers.

A ride around the balance of the Ring seemed a worthwhile time investment, so we boarded the number 1 tram to continue the journey that had included an unexpected diversion the day before. We only went two stops before we saw the huge market in front of the Rathaus (the Town Hall) and hundreds of skaters on the ice rink. It was, we discovered, the last day of the Eistraum – the Ice Dream. Two large ice rinks were placed in front of the Rathaus (It makes a wonderful backdrop). The rinks were connected by winding ice paths so the skaters could waft between them. In the middle of all this slipping and sliding action a



market sold Austrian edibles and drinks.

The tradition is that you pay EUR5 deposit on the mug and EUR2 for the contents. If you want to souvenir the mug no one objects. We wanted to keep our two Eistraum mugs and the gluhwein it contained was certainly appreciated in the cold air, although by now the rain had left.

Now slightly light-headed and warm-hearted we reboarded the number 1 tram, continuing past the once frequently frequented McDonald's, the twin-level Schottentur terminus that once represented our connection for so many public transport journeys, and the French hotel where Mrs Hunt once had a meal with someone else's wife.

Satisfied with the warmth of the tram we allowed it to convey us out of the Ring and into the 3<sup>rd</sup> district which Mrs Hunt soon recognised was not far from my old office. A little further along we came up to the Hundertwasser house and, although I had visited it a number of times, Mrs Hunt had not. So we alighted.



Hundertwasser was an architectural phenomenon. He was famous for his hatred of straight lines, which he described as "Godless". So when asked to build a public housing complex in the third district he created a building without straight lines. The footpaths have gentle little hillocks designed in, so it feels like you are walking on the real earth. Windows are odd shapes and irregularly placed. The walls are covered in splotches of colour, mostly with ceramic tiles. Trees and bushes poke out of the building in unexpected places.

This work of architectural art sits in the midst of rows of dull, and mostly grey, 18<sup>th</sup> century apartment blocks. The contrast is breathtaking. And wonderful. It is the kind of house one might expect to see in Alice in Wonderland. But here it is, in the middle of a very conservative, but art loving city.

Hundertwasser's other significant work in Vienna is his rejuvenation of the huge, and originally Stalinist, city incinerator built on the canal to provide heating to public housing at the northern end of town. The chimney is festooned with the most outrageous carbuncle of ceramic tiles in gold, red, green – well, every colour. It's a wonder of the world.

Mrs Hunt turned out to be as impressed as I had been a decade before. And, as with the Bruegels, it showed that there is much to see in Vienna that even four years living cannot accomplish.

We struck up a nice relationship with the lady running the "Village Galerie" and bought some T-shirts to remember our visit. And a thimble to add to Mrs Hunt's vast international collection.

Back on the number 1 tram we ended up in the Prater. Here was another part of Vienna that we never explored during our live-in period. Can't imagine why. We had visited the fun fair end of the Prater with its iconic Ferris wheel. Even rode it once. But the fun fair is the tip of this green iceberg. The roads and lawns stretch away in long straight (unHundertwasserish) rows beyond the horizon. I stood on the middle of one lane to photograph the perspective. The trees disappear into a vanishing point.

Once people strolled here in their Sunday best,



riding their horses, waving from their carriages. Now motor vehicles are banned. And the paths and lanes are full of joggers and walkers. Some with strollers or hi-tech prams. Many on bicycles. Family groups riding bikes from one-sixteenth to full size all arrayed in undisciplined clusters. Doubtless the children on the one-sixteenth size bikes go home to practice on their one-sixteenth size violins. With equal precocity. Sunday in the Prater was a complete celebration of life, of exercise, of community, of a city built with people in mind.



Back on the tram we shared part of the journey with a lady and her dog. Dogs have more rights on public transport in Vienna than children. Or, at least, they are more tolerated.

So it was back to the hotel on the number 1 tram, conveniently dropping us at our hotel front door, and a snooze from all our exertions.

We determined to have the best schnitzel in the world for dinner. Yes, Figelmüller's. We arrived at about 7pm which is early for dinner in Vienna, but already the original Figelmüller's was packed. A little assertiveness was required, so we simply entered, and saw a couple stand up from their table.

"Sind Sie unterwegs?" we asked *Are you leaving?*

They took that split second longer to process the question that indicated that they were not native German speakers, but then replied "Ja." So we helped them with their jackets and stood by the table as the

waiter appeared to clear their tables.

"May we have this table?" we asked in German.

The waiter adopted the traditional attitude of world-weariness at hearing the most impossible of requests. He bustled to his work station and consulted his writing pad.

"I have a booking at 8.30pm, so as long as you are out by then, you can have it," he replied in German. Now it was our turn to adopt the look of people requiring time to translate, so asked him to say it in English. It was only 7.30pm and we were only going to eat schnitzel, so we agreed.

Meanwhile, out in the laneway, dozens waited to be called inside. Austrians respect assertiveness.

A little local knowledge is a useful thing in Figelmüller's because the schnitzels are not merely tender and delicious. They are also huge. Once settled down we watched the shocked faces of other patrons as their schnitzels arrived, one for each person. The schnitzels are about three handspans across and overflow the dinner plate in every direction. Most people order one each and then are stunned when it comes.

Locals, among whom we were suddenly renumbered as soon as we ordered, know to order just one schnitzel and two salads. We did so, altering our relationship with the officious waiter immediately, despite our unavoidably accented German. Two glasses of Zweigelt, the Austrian red, added to the fake impression we conveyed of locality. To our left a table of five Japanese men and one Austrian were saying *Konbanwa* to a half dozen schnitzels bigger than their faces.

We enjoyed our meal and asked for the bill, evacuating our place in plenty of time for the waiter's 8.30 guests who probably had been standing out in the lane since 7.00.

The waiter asked us automatically if we have enjoyed the meal. "Geschmeckt?"

"Always the best," we replied, as if we had made the trip to Vienna for this purpose alone. *Yes, every year we make a pilgrimage here to check the schnitzel quality. See you in 2010, Fritz.*

## Monday

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To the accompaniment of more Tyrolean band music and live cam pictures of powder snow on endless ski runs, we prepared for our return to the old haunts of the 18<sup>th</sup> district. The number 1 tram took us around to Schottentur, and then we descended to the tram terminus below. There trams

going to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> districts trundle around a circle that points them back in the right direction.

And suddenly it seemed as if nothing had changed. Maybe the cleaning of the turrets of the Votive Church had got a little further, although the church must have been shrouded in scaffolding now for a decade or more. And the well dressed panhandler was still working the crowd of public transportees as he did a decade before. A man looking less in need of a Euro you would be unlikely to see.

The 41 tram was not the first to arrive. Number 38 to Grinzing. Number 40 to Gersthof. This one would take us part of the way. But we were on holidays. We could wait.

Nostalgia. Sometimes the reality proves every bit as good as the memory. The ride on the 41 tram “home” to the 18<sup>th</sup> district felt as familiar as a favourite jacket. Almost nothing had changed. The dull buildings of the University improved by a gaggle of young people on their steps. A little picture show on the right that always seemed to be showing *Pippy Longstocking*. Still there. But showing something else at last. A Starbucks. Oh well, some things were new, and not necessarily better. Vienna is strong coffee capital of the world. Who drinks Starbucks? A young woman emerged with the coffee-cup-to-go. She crossed behind the tram and into the University. Maybe that answered the question.

The French place, where you could learn French (surprising?). The street down to the US embassy which happened to be near our dentist and frequently made our dental appointments rather longer as the street was blocked because of anti-American sentiment.

The Konditorei with all those 200% sugar tarts in the window on the corner where the Grinzing tram turned right. The Volksoper where we enjoyed a rendition of *My Fair Lady* in German, including the Cockney bits rendered in Wienerisch. Under the railway. Up past familiar shops in Währingerstrasse.

“Look out for the shop where I used to buy Villeroy and Boch?” Mrs Hunt asked. And in a moment added, “Oh look. It’s still there.” I felt a visit had been just added to our later itinerary.

Up past the park where Schubert and Beethoven were originally buried. Gravestones remain, but the bodies were soon transferred to the main cemetery south of the city. Around a little square surrounded by gorgeous apartment buildings. All so familiar and friendly.

Up to Gersthof and the second railway line. Some of the takeaway stands seemed to have had 21<sup>st</sup> century renovations. Still in place was the hairdresser Mrs Hunt first went to in 1997, and where she felt obliged to tip every person in the salon, including three customers and two dogs. Later she found a more amenable, and English speaking establishment, owned and run by Herr Riha (which made for a nice joke in English).

At Gersthof we turned right and up past familiar shops that we rarely patronised, although the little camera store where I used to buy photo corners for my albums seemed still in place. Further along I caught no sight of our optometrist, although a Chinese restaurant we visited once in our early days was still there. We made the mistake of ordering three spring rolls each as an appetiser, only to discover that Chinese-Austrian spring rolls are as large as Aussie sausage rolls.

The supermarket, Julius Meinl, was still there, but now it was renamed *Spar Gourmet*. I guess they got bought out. The old Pötzleinsdorf chapel remained unchanged, as it doubtless had been for centuries. And Billa, our regular supermarket, was next on the left.



“Ooh Billa, it’s still there,” Mrs Hunt cooed as if seeing a long lost relative. Given that visits to Billa were, at least initially, adventures in cross-cultural label interpretation and check-out operator aggression, I had the feeling that nostalgia was conquering memory in the Mrs Hunt mind.

We passed “our” street with its pharmacy unchanged on the corner. This was the street down which we slithered our car once as the wet road turned to shiny ice just as we started down from the top. The car slid into the right hand gutter which fortunately was always free of cars and bumped, bumped, bumped down the hill responding to neither steering nor brakes. Richard, in the back had asked, “Are you doing that on purpose, Dad?” Fortunately we were only going about 5 kmh and once we got to the bottom we came to rest a metre or two before the tram tracks.



We passed Dr Schillinger’s house and then his rooms, and alighted at the terminus into cold air, and low clouds threatening rain. But the recognition of so much that was familiar kept our spirits high as we walked back down the gentle hill towards Wurzingergasse – our street. Maybe one or two of the apartment blocks had been painted, but otherwise all was as we had left it. Although we knew that the interior of our apartment had been completely gutted by the new owners after we left.

We walked around the corner, taking the obligatory photos which I knew would match, almost

to the leaf, photos taken a decade before. Down past the bilingual school, now with a huge modern wing added to the older building, and we speculated how Richard might have fared had we enrolled him there rather than at the American school.

Mrs Hunt pointed out a parking spot where, on a particularly blizzarding day, I had half-accidentally slid the car sideways into a parking spot and then announced, “That’ll do” as if the manoeuvre had been intentional. I looked for a plaque commemorating this feat of exceptional car control, but perhaps the memorial was still caught up in Austrian red tape.

The greengrocer on the corner was gone. Here we would be amused annually by their display of huge pumpkins, the shape of butternut pumpkins but ten times the size. They seemed to take great joy in finding the most phallic and displaying it with exhibitionist pride. Here we also bought Sturm – first skimmings of the new wine. It was named, we discovered through experience, after the storm it could create in your stomach.



Not gone, but certainly transformed was the derelict old house opposite our tram stop. Once we would stand, waiting for the tram, while we looked across at a small empty mansion, surrounded by an overgrown untidy yard (you couldn’t bless it with the word *garden*). We often wondered why such a well placed property would be left in such an unkempt state. Now the answer to our question was moot. Not only had the garden been rejuvenated, but the mansion had been altered beyond recognition and was now surrounded by a jumble of units.

Billa was to be found, as before, behind an arch that led into a small car park. Inside, the supermarket had undergone a complete makeover. We wandered about and then queued for a rather long time to purchase two apples and a packet of Gummibären. A little further down the road, Spar Gourmet still looked very like the Julius Meinl we had known. It had undergone an internal makeover not long before we left.

Just beyond Spar Gourmet we rejoined the 41 tram in the reverse direction towards the city and planned a stopover at the Villeroy and Boch shop on Martinstrasse. We left the tram and entered a

downpour, hurrying to our shopping appointment, ducking in and out of the few shelters on offer. Full awnings in front of shops are a rarity in snow country.

Soon we found the small door, a bolt-hole in between knee-high display windows and entered the warmth of the shop, dripping onto their floorboards. Around tight corners in this half-basement shop, rooms opened up to display high quality items for your kitchen and dining pleasure. Mrs Hunt spotted the small Villeroy and Boch jar that had been her desire and then noticed a matching breakfast coffee cup and saucer.

"We should get that for your morning coffee," she suggested, recalling that my present large cup was now chipped and looking sad.

"Good idea," I agreed.

Only as we left the shop did I do the calculation.

"You realise we just bought a one hundred dollar coffee cup?" I can vouch the coffee tastes even better in an expensive cup.

Mrs Hunt and I explained in the required *germlish* that we used to live here, that she used to shop here, that we spent a lot of money here before (and were evidently doing so still), and that we returned for sentimental reasons. One of the shop assistants returned with a free gift of a Victoronix knife to commemorate the occasion.

Outside, the storm had abated somewhat but instead of getting a bread roll at the bakery further up the street, we headed for the warm dry of the nearest tram and our next shopping assignment – A stickers.

A stickers are those stickers that used to be applied to European cars to indicate which country they came from. I noted that most late model cars seemed not to carry them anymore, so perhaps the rules have changed. But being Aussies we still thought it would be cute to put A stickers on our cars at home, and even if they did carry the Austrian flag that would express our affection for Vienna.

We thought we recalled a souvenir kiosk at Schottentur that sold A stickers, but no luck today. We caught the tram to Kärntnerstrasse and, in the underground shopping mall, found an Arabic speaking shop-keeper who had some samples, and later added to our small collection at a souvenir stand. Between these two purchases we indulged in a little lunch, typically Viennese. At an *Imbiss* we bought a hot dog for Mrs Hunt and I selected Käsekrainer, sliced, with sweet mustard. This is the sausage that contains a centre of soft cheese, and loads of garlic and comes served on a paper plate with a toothpick as a fork. Delicious. And for hours afterwards! Unfortunately, Mrs Hunt's hot dog did not get a Michelin hat.

Our afternoon plan was to take another tram ride to unfamiliar areas. We chose the 31 tram. It took us North and East over the river into the area of Vienna more recently developed. The suburbs here look more post-war in their building design, the streets are wider, and the views are, frankly, more boring. However, we did enjoy passing over the Danube and seeing the Donauinsel, the long skinny, car-free island in the middle of the river where Mrs Hunt once almost rode her bicycle into a nude man. Before the tram reached its terminus we were ready to return, so we did.

Back at the Ring we asked a young woman at the tram stop whether there still was a tram that did the circuit of the Ringstrasse. She didn't think so. That was good enough confirmation for us. So we waited for a number 1 tram that took us back to our hotel.

After a rest, we were back on trams. This time the 38 heading for Grinzing. Grinzing was once in the countryside and the main street, winding up a hill, still looks sufficiently rural to attract tourists. We had visited once or twice when we lived here, but somehow the place seemed less authentic, and more expensive, than the heurigers up the road from home in Pötszleinsdorf and Neustift-am-Wald. So we were prepared for the tourist experience. Some of the establishments were still closed for the late winter and we entered a heuriger more or less at random.

Through a courtyard and up a flight of stairs, a typical Viennese experience, we came upon a dining hall with refectory style tables and a welcoming waiter (MUST be a tourist establishment). The food was up to the usual heuriger standard (edible but ordinary), while the entertainment was

great. The mix of clientele was an entertainment. Mostly tourists, but in one or two cases accompanied by locals who boisterously sang along with the two strolling musicians. A piano accordionist and a violinist played non-stop the whole evening.



They were good, but not so good that we particularly wanted them to come and sit beside us and serenade us. Somehow that would seem a bit embarrassing, right? So they came and sat right beside us. And serenaded us. Finding out that we were Aussies, they feigned unmitigated delight and played three bars of “Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport” before I stopped them with a request to play a Viennese song that was mentioned on the place mats on our table. They did so with pleasure, a very pretty melody, while the violinist waved his instrument,

decorated with a EUR20 note in our general direction. Mrs Hunt was making strange faces at me, but I thought she was just enjoying the results of my song request. I thanked them and they hesitated only momentarily before sloping off to more productive climes.

Only when they had left did Mrs Hunt explain her grimacing smiles. And, on the way out, we made a big show of sliding a EUR20 bill across the table to them.

“Oh, the Australians!” they said with either joy or irony, it was hard to tell either way.

## Tuesday

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Tuesday was to be our last day in Vienna. There were still touristy things to do, but somehow we were feeling that we had done all the things we wanted to do. Our minds and hearts were already on the plane we would catch that evening, bound for Hong Kong via Zurich.

Yet there was a day to use up, and I thought of one more touristy thing I wanted to accomplish, and there was definitely one more on Mrs Hunt’s agenda. For me the attractions were music and history, for Mrs Hunt, shopping nostalgia. Thus the morning was to be spent looking for Beethoven followed by looking for Gerngross.

Out in the northern suburbs of Vienna is an area called Heiligenstadt. When we lived there it was most remarkable for a public housing estate named after Karl Marx that combined art deco design with socialist-inspired housing. And for the fact that the building was fully one kilometre long. A hundred years earlier Heiligenstadt was a country retreat for Beethoven and others.

We took our time over breakfast, packed our bags and manhandled them into the left luggage room which was already jam packed with the luggage of others with evening itineraries. The hotel offered a good value shuttle service, so we booked it for later.

Up to the Ring once again and onto the D tram. Why this tram would be known by a letter rather than a number is a question we never asked, and therefore for which we had no answer, but also no anxiety. We passed by the aforementioned Karl Marx Hof, remarking on its one-kilometre length. Then it was a short two-stop bus ride and a short walk up two side streets to number 6 Probusgasse and the Beethovenhaus.

The question has been asked why Beethoven wrote the Pathetique Sonata in four flats. The usual answer is, because he had to move three times. In Heiligenstadt it seems he was just as peripatetic. For there is not just one Beethovenhaus here, but at least four. And the one containing the small two-room museum may not have even been blessed by the great composer’s residence. A

note in the house read “in this house, or one just like it...” Evidently there is no proof the man ever lived in this house, but those who cavil about the historical accuracy of the location are suffering from post-enlightenment dedication to accuracy over truth. So he didn't live *exactly* here? Well, build a bridge! I don't need to read the DNA to get the idea. Next you'll be telling me that an mp3 file isn't *really* music.

A short walk between the attractive houses that have grown around Beethovenhaus to convert a country community into a suburb takes one to a large map on the garden wall of an old church in Pfarrr Place. Here you can check out the other houses of Beethoven,



including one right by the church that has for most years since the great composer's residence been run as a Heuriger.

A copy of Beethoven's famous letter from Heiligenstadt is displayed in the museum with a helpful English translation. In the letter, to his family and friends, Beethoven reveals his near suicidal feelings over the

loss of his hearing and how that has shaped his behaviour (mostly badly, apparently). Although he wrote the document in 1802 when just 28, he did not give it to anyone. It was discovered after his death in 1827. It is sad to read of his pain almost 200 years later in this little bare room. He knew he was talented. But did he know that his music would still be heard, yes heard, by millions so long afterwards? Even on mp3.

After a quick diversion for a bottle of Almdudler, a local apple-ish soft drink, we rode the D tram back towards the centre of the city and the object of Mrs Hunt's selected destination de jour—Mariahilfstrasse. Given that so much of the modern homemaker's life is spent in shops, it is entirely natural that she would want to revisit these haunts once stalked so regularly with credit card in hand.

We walked up the hill from the Ring towards Neubaugasse where we found a neat and clean Nord See fast food outlet. This chain of fresh fast food has a distinctly Scandinavian feel about it. All white and sharp edges. And the counter displays are dominated by various sea foods, ready to go. And, like so many European establishments, you can buy a glass of wine without having to go next door. It's called *sensible*.

Thus fortified, we repaired to the big four storey department store, named Gerngross, which means “Big Happy”. That it was aptly named you could tell just by looking at Mrs Hunt's face as we swung through the revolving front door.

Quickly bored, I kept ascending to Merkur, an electrical emporium higher up which at least had 25 different 200 centimetre plasma TVs ranked side by side for comparative shoppers. The prices looked almost reasonable. Oh yes, Euros...

Already feeling the fatigue of too much walking, we set off down the hill, stopping briefly for an ice cream. Schokolade is good in any language. And any temperature. It might have been 5 degrees outside, but the ice cream didn't seem to care.

Back at the Hotel Papageno we were way early for our shuttle to the airport, so we spent the time using the free Internet in the lobby and reading. I had discovered Terry Pratchett's *Discworld*



series courtesy of a niece who left the first two books in Bellegarde, thus establishing my literary agenda for the next decade.

Everything worked fine en route and at the airport, but there was one final excitement.

The pilot announced that we were “first for takeoff” as we approached the end of the taxiway and we felt the plane accelerating even as we turned onto the runway. Then a sudden lurch and we stopped dead. Well not *dead* in any literal sense. No injuries, apart from fright and the look of oncoming heart attack from Mrs Hunt on the aisle seat. But before she could ask whether this meant we were all going to die horribly, the pilot announced his apologies, explaining that “we saw something not quite right on our instruments, so we thought it best to start over.”

Which they did.