

Two "Number Two" Stories

By George Kun

I would like to acknowledge my thanks to my daughter, who taught me the meaning of "number two" as a more classy reference to "shitty" things, as will be covered in the next two stories.

My First "Number Two Story" is about some "Ferry, Ferry dangerous" things I've done some time ago.

A little bit of history may put things in context. In the mid 90s a very ill-conceived, advertising campaign about the Canadian economic, social, political and natural paradise, became the irresistible "Fata Morgana" to Czech and Slovak Gypsies, who started arriving in droves to Canada, with legitimate Czech Passports. Even before their promotion to the status of "Roma", they started demonstrating to the Canadians how generous their society really was, applied en masse for political asylum and put the Welfare system in overdrive as a moderate supplemental income. The main income was coming from massive fraud and criminal activities, to an extent that even the slow and shy to react Canadian Government had to do something to stave off the massive arrivals. So they imposed Entry Visas for all Czech and Slovak citizens that all had the same passport color, but not necessarily the same skin color. The political correctness of the time did not allow discrimination based on skin color or ethnic origin for passport holders of the same country. Naturally, some less dark Czechs, who only wanted to visit their relatives or friends and then go home, had to pay hefty visa fees or just postponed their trip.

The furious Czech government, even under the open minded and progressive president Vaclav Havel, retaliated harshly and imposed visas on all Canadians travelling to or even transiting through the Czech Republic. Moreover, in the hype of this unprecedented snub of anybody and anything Canadian, the Czech border guards were allowed to be rude and boorish with the tourists already annoyed by being charged unreasonably high Entry or Transit Visa fees, right there, on the spot.

This temporary political clowning was still in full swing when we were considering a spring break in Europe. My wife's vacation opportunity in February overlapped with her nostalgia to visit her mother in Croatia, so she decided to go and was eagerly awaiting my reaction to her great plans. I was also able to arrange for over two weeks away from work. It just so happened that the best and cheapest connection to Split, Croatia was through Prague. I quickly realized that I would have to pass a love and loyalty test for my extended family in its ideal form of

joining my wife and spending all my time there and staying at my mother-in-law's house.

Fortunately, things in life are not ideal, nor should they be in the peak of the European Alpine Ski season. The only thing that had to be ideal was my ability to sell an acceptable compromise package to my wife and keep all three parties somewhat happy.

To my greatest surprise, the value of my joining the trip was rated high enough to warrant good negotiations with a truly great outcome. The deal ended up with us flying together to Prague, my wife changing flights and continuing to Croatia. Me, getting off the plane, renting a car and driving to Austria for some top-notch alpine skiing, then driving back to Prague, hopefully in one piece, boarding a flight to Croatia and joining the "Croatians" for a few days, without talking too much about my skiing interruption, making the best of that leg of the trip and then nicely returning home with my wife. **That was the plan.**

So let's see what actually happened.

After we landed at Ruzyne, the Prague Airport, my wife Lori went to the Croatian Airlines terminal for her connecting flight and I went straight to the passport control line-up for admission into the Czech Republic. The line moved relatively fast, until my turn came to shove my Canadian passport into the passport control wicket. First I noticed a pair of small white hands with short fat fingers fumbling with my document. Then I looked-up to a round face, with blue scrutinizing eyes, staring at me. The border officer asked me in Czech: "Do you speak Czech?" "Yes", I proudly replied. Then his thin lips contorted into a condescending grin and he said: "Your last name is not Kun, is it?" "Actually it is, unchanged from birth", I said. He went on: "No, no, no,... your name is not Kun, it is Kuna, right? Wasn't that your name when you escaped from Czechoslovakia?" I tried to keep calm and added: "I did not escape from Czechoslovakia, I left legally from Romania". He said: "You are very lucky, times have changed, now you can tell me anything you want, but I know the truth". At that point, even though he was clearly in power and still could have harassed me if he chose to do so, I felt sorry for him, the way you feel sorry for someone mentally retarded. I risked saying: "Yes, times have changed, don't you think for the better?" He gave me a "bugger-off" look and pointed to my next stop-over, another window where I was supposed to pay my transit visa fee, before being allowed to enter the country. It turned out to be the equivalent of \$75, just for a twenty-four-hour transit. Fortunately my wife did not have to enter the country.

The car rental experience was not too bad, except for the fact that they did not accept my credit card insurance coverage and forced me to buy the one offered by the local AVIS office.

By then it was already 11:00 am, and I had to cross the Czech-Austrian border and make it hopefully to a ski resort, in day light, if possible.

I rented a two door VW Golf and hit the road. That was of course in the pre-GPS era, and I covered the pilot seat with nice Michelin maps with main roads already highlighted during my flight. I also had a large magnifying glass with a handle that was slipping off the seat at every turn, so I secured that one too, by hanging it off the pilot seat's head rest.

I did not realize that there was no real highway till close to the Austrian border towards Linz, so it took me almost three hours to get there for a distance that I hoped would be covered in half that time.

Crossing the border was uneventful but the driving became finally exciting and liberating, like going for a run after you finished touring the park with your grandpa in a wheel-chair.

After passing Linz and driving really fast, suddenly I got an extraordinarily powerful urge for a "Number Two". I realized that I'd been sitting in the car for four hours since I left Prague, and did not stop at all, other than slowing down at the border crossing.

I started panicking and feeling sick, but still strongly determined to take any relieving action only outside the car. I started looking desperately for the next exit and I noticed a very remote green sign that I was not able yet to read but it looked like it might be an exit.

A new wave of urge and sickness hit me in a way that felt like an imminent fainting would follow. Not a good thing when you are **driving** and equally bad if you stop on a highway.

And then, all of a sudden, God showed his mercy and I noticed on my right hand side a large half circle paved road lane that was accessible straight from the highway's right line by entering it "one way" counter clockwise. In the middle of the road was a small white building; unmistakably a toilet.

The devil's works are never too far from God's blessings, and my speed was too high to slow down and enter the one way road the proper way. In fact, I was barely able to slow down to enter the semi-circle by its exit, and drive clockwise, the wrong way, but I managed to do that.

While driving the next few seconds towards the toilet, I noticed a large white Mercedes entering the proper way and heading towards the toilet as well. For a moment, I imagined that there may be only one toilet, and there was no way I was going to let those Mercedes bastards beat me at it, so I stopped, jumped out of the car, ran like a madman to what really turned out to be the only toilet, pushed the door with both hands and conquered the toilet with abandon and skill, because I managed to hit the seat with my pants down.

Happiness and joy are relative, but what happened inside that room was absolute. It was also a very appropriate moment to reconsider my occasional atheistic rebellion, and acknowledge once and for all, that GOD does exist, and he's just proven it.

When I finally walked out, still with a euphoric smile on my face, I noticed that the white Mercedes was still there. I thought that if those people had urges even remotely close to the ones I had, seeing me now coming out, they would jump out of the car any moment.

They did jump out, indeed; two of them. Both very tall and slim in sharp Austrian police uniforms. I said to myself, well, policemen are people too; they have needs just like anybody else.

They did not seem to have any of those needs I was suspecting, because they were walking quickly and menacingly towards me, not towards the toilet. I quickly realized that their real need was to talk to me and I got scared, as they say "shitless" a term quite appropriate given my successful venture just a few minutes before.

The one who looked "in charge" addressed me in a firm and authoritative voice: **"Do you know zet wass you did is ferry, ferry, dangerous?"** At first, I thought that he was referring to the dangers of going to roadside public toilets, but then I realized how silly that assumption was and I recomposed myself and said, "I am very sorry, I had an urgent need, I missed the entrance and had to enter by the exit, but I had full visibility and was really careful, and nobody was in the exit lane"

The policeman was clearly annoyed by that long and totally useless explanation and repeated: **"Do you know zet wass you did is ferry, ferry, dangerous?"** With hard to explain stubbornness, I tried again: "You are absolutely right, officer, I am very sorry, please understand and..." That how far I got. Then, with a condescending look and impatient attitude, demanded to see my passport and my driver's licence, and I quickly obliged.

What followed felt like an eternity. The two officers disappeared into their spacious Mercedes with my most important documents. I had no idea what would follow, but I felt very uneasy.

Finally, in about 40 minutes, they both re-emerged from their unmarked car and handed over to me a four page full-size document, with densely spaced bi-lingual (German and English) headings, and hand-written notice of offence in German, explaining in minute detail all the "ferry, ferry dangerous" things I'd done. The handing over of my copy of the paper came with a brief verbal notification: "You must pay 200 DM (Deutsch Marks) immediately." My knees got soft, my jaw dropped, my mind got clouded and I asked: "Don't you use Schillings in Austria?" This time the junior officer replied: "Do you have Schillings?" I said, "No I don't think so. Can I pay in Canadian dollars or with a credit card?" That was the first

time I'd noticed something close to a human smirk, accompanied with a "No". After an awkward moment, the officer "in charge" said, "If you don't have 200 DM, you will have to accompany us to the Police Head Office in Linz, tonight or tomorrow to explain the situation."

My knees did not get any firmer, but my memory got sharper and all of a sudden I remembered that I actually had exactly 200 DM in a hidden pocket in my wallet, money that was stashed there for my later trip to Croatia, to impress my mother-in-law with a gift or a treat of some kind, to offset the unpopularity of my Austrian escapade on my way to Croatia.

I said to the officer that I think I had the money and I'll bring it from the car. They looked at me suspiciously, and followed me with their looks all the way, but I returned quickly with the money and handed it to them. Then they disappeared again into the car, and at that point I was still without my passport, driver's license, and cash. I never felt that bad, humiliated, and helpless.

I waited another 20 minutes, which I used to comfort myself with humorous thoughts such as: **"This was the most expensive crap I've ever taken in my life, and I am proud that I was able to afford it!"**

Then the dark side of my fury kicked in and I started mentally cursing those bloody Nazi Austrians, who were not any better than the savage lowest of the lowest German SS officers, and what a pity that such a beautiful country like Austria was run by such mean, heartless, square-headed, ugly people.

By the time my fantasy ran out of imagery of hatred and revenge, the two officers popped up again from their car, this time with another elaborate receipt for my 200 DM fine.

My first impulse was to rip up the receipt and spit in their faces, but before even contemplating further such a stupid and counterproductive gesture, I noticed that both of them were smiling, I mean really smiling, smiling at me, not laughing at me... with friendly looks and gestures.

I was really puzzled, and the more senior officer said: "The traffic business is finished now, **how can we help you?"**

I looked at them and said: **"You already helped me beating the record for paying the highest cost per dump"**. The officer looked a little puzzled and asked: "What does *pedump* mean?" I felt that teaching the officer English slang may not be a good idea under the circumstances, so I said: "I meant that I would like to be more pedant."

To my disbelief, they started laughing and showing ability to handle humor. One of them said: "You are funny. What brings you to Austria?" I said: "Actually, I came here to relax a few days and do some quality downhill skiing."

The faces of the officers changed visibly, showing interest and pride. One of them asked: "Do you know where you want to go?" I said, "I am heading towards Salzburg, lots of good skiing areas there, I was told".

The officers spent the next twenty minutes making phone calls, checking maps, listening to snow reports, and then handed me a neatly hand written summary of resorts, inns, snow conditions and optimal access roads. Then they shook my hand, wished me safe driving and a great holiday in Austria and buggered off, back to their core duties of keeping Austria a neat, civilized, orderly, and disciplined country, unspoiled by unruly foreigners.

I found their tips to be extremely helpful and useful. It was already 7:00 pm and dark when I made it to Hüttau, a small picturesque mountain village, and I easily found the family-run Inn on the police list.

Unfortunately, the owner and their friends, were having a party right in the lobby, were singing loud and swaying by holding each other around the shoulders and were inebriated out of their minds. The only thing they were receptive to was having me join them in the boozing and talk business later, something I was absolutely not interested in.

So I quickly realized that unless you have a reservation made during the day, no point in showing-up as a total stranger after 6:00 pm...

I went quickly back to my car and kept driving to Altenmarkt in Pongau, a lovely small mountain village, where I arrived close to 8:00pm. I asked around and stopped by a few places, but there was no accommodation available. I got out of the car, to breathe some fresh air, because it was such a lovely quiet night and starting to snow with large flakes; a paradise to look at, a nightmare to drive during the night.

All of a sudden, an older couple emerged from "nowhere", crossing the road on cross-country skis and stopped in front of the chalet where I parked my car. They started slowly removing their skis after their daily "after dinner" walk and acknowledged my presence with a smile and a light nod.

I made a few remarks about the beauty and health of this great outdoors activity, and they appeared to appreciate my comments, even though their English was very limited. My very poor German filled in some gaps, and to my surprise, they were able to understand some Italian and even Croatian, because they learned some from their regular Croatian guest.

It turned out that their lovely chalet was actually set-up as a family inn with seven rooms, one being free, because the Croatian family that was supposed to check in the night before, just cancelled.

After a brief chat, a few smiles and some pats on the back, the bond and trust between real mountain life lovers was created and I ended-up staying there for a

week, enjoying a very cosy room, superbly rich and varied breakfasts and the good company of the lovely hosts, all at what we would call, by North American standards, "budget priced".

All my following days were sunny except the first one, a Sunday, so foggy I could not even see my car from the chalet window. My hosts suggested that it may not be wise to head for the slopes before the fog cleared; maybe later in the morning. Spontaneously, I said, "**It might be ferry, ferry dangerous, but not illegal, right?**" Clearly they had no idea what I was talking about, but smiled anyway, assuming that I probably knew what I was talking about.

Fortunately, on Sundays, Altenmarkt was hosting the weekly flea market, a colorful event that even the out-of-town guests knew about and enjoyed going to. My hosts were just about leaving to the Flea Market and suggested that if I was interested, I might follow them by car from behind, just a short drive. I happily took on their offer.

I spent a couple of hours there, going from stand to stand, looking at lovely painted wooden crafts, toys, tools, paintings, furniture, clothing, musical instruments, and nondescript junk.

The food stands were very enticing too, with on the spot grilled spicy sausages served with sauerkraut, bean soup, nice breads, cakes, nuts, and sweets. Hot, spicy mulled wine, served in locally crafted mugs, was everywhere and could be smelled from a distance.

Just when I was about to leave, I noticed a neat book stand with tons of fashion and gossip magazines, and many old and newer books lying randomly on the main counter. A full book cover size picture of Anne Frank caught my attention, and yes, it was an older edition of the "Diary of Anne Frank". As I was glancing further, I saw another book with a red cover and a black swastika inside a white circle, overlapping the large title in faded gray gothic letters: "Mein Kampf". All fitting nicely into the traditions of this lovely, politically "neutral" country, with the right and freedom to select what is and was isn't "ferry, ferry dangerous".

I was wondering if the availability of this book was indicative of a high demand for it or perhaps it was there for decades, just ignored.

After that, I noticed that the fog was clearing and the bright sun was shyly but surely re-emerging from the clouds. I quickly abandoned my fog-time philosophical contemplations in favor of heading for the slopes and engaging in my favorite "ferry, ferry dangerous" winter sport. And I lived happily ever after.