

Susanne Wolter Bids Us Farewell



One Monday afternoon, I visited Susanne Wolter (a longtime member who is relocating to Boulder Colorado) to find out just what kept her in the Friendship Force all this time.

Susanne is widowed and was one of the first people that Sam and I met after joining the Friendship Force. She told us that she biked or walked daily and in the winter, she often skied since she lived close to 3-Rivers Park in Plymouth. We lived close so offered to carpool to events to enjoy her company.

Susanne is truly a world traveler; having visited 78 countries and every state in the United States. She is not planning to quit traveling yet with Manchester, England and Ireland on the bucket list after she is settled in Boulder.

Susanne (a native of Germany) met her husband Don on a train trip to Istanbul, Turkey in 1963. He was there as a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Frankfurt and she a student at the University of Göttingen. Some of this international train route was the same as the original Orient Express.

The train went from München (Munich) via Wien (Vienna), Graz, Austria, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, Sofia, Bulgaria to Istanbul. A German University Organization chartered several train wagons. The train wagons were divided up into small

compartments. The organizer seated four in each, two men and two women. Don and Susanne and their roommates were in the same compartment. The train trip took 48 hours; plenty of time to get to know one another. The trip was mostly a “fend for yourself” adventure and the compartment companions toured Istanbul together. After a week, they continued by bus along the West coast of Turkey; then by boat to a Greek island and eventually by boat to Athens. From there they took a train back to München.

It was a four-week trip. That's how they met, by Fate or Chance! The year before Susanne had made a similar trip with her roommate from Göttingen to Greece. The trips were fun. Nothing was scheduled in Istanbul or other cities. In areas where there were old sites, like Ephesus, with an organized tour you could choose to join or not. It was Susanne's kind of travel and it turns out Don's also. Clearly, these adventurous people found their match. In 1964, Susanne moved to the US to marry Don. Their honeymoon was to Niagara Falls, the New England states and New York City.

Susanne finished college in Minnesota. They soon began travel adventures with children in tow. One memory is that their daughter's first passport photo was taken in an infant seat since she wasn't sitting on her own yet!

In 1981 friends of theirs in the School District where Don worked told them about a trip they took with Friendship Force to Berlin, Germany. Based on their praise of the club Don and Susanne decided to join. Their first exchange experience was a trip to Maracaibo, Venezuela for one week with a side trip to the jungle and Angel Falls. They were always eager to host incoming exchange guests as well.

At the start of their experience with FF as many as 250 people were personally interviewed for

exchanges, but ambassador applicants were not told in advance where the trip would take them. This was to make sure they were tolerant of other cultures. Everyone was not accepted. At that time in the world there was a lot of mistrust of other cultures.

Susanne admitted that she and Don took many of their trips on their own because they had a long summer break from teaching. They did get great tips for planning these trips from Friendship Force exchange programs.

Susanne says that they stayed in Friendship Force because they formed many friendships with fun and interesting people. within the club. There were also many interesting and fun activities, often including the children.

Don Wolter donated greatly to the Twin Cities club by developing a website, newsletters, infusing his humor, etc. Susanne says she mostly supported his efforts in boosting the club activities. He was quite a dynamo; an avid cross country skier and coach who coached both their children Michael and Sonja at Armstrong High School where he taught. Later both skied in college and Michael qualified several times for the Junior Olympics. Don also coached the skiers on those teams. Sonja and Michael still participate in ski races.

Now Susanne relives the excitement of competitive cross-country skiing through their grandchildren Peter (18) and Ella (16) who are following in Michael's ski-tracks! Susanne's son Michael and daughter-in-law Molly and the grandchildren live in Hailey Idaho; I am sure she'll take a few trips to watch their races next winter or maybe to do some skiing with them!

Susanne is a delightful person to be around. She is a perfect role model for healthy aging who exudes energy, example and positivity.

Her move to Boulder wasn't an easy decision. I recall over a year ago when she began exploring the idea of moving to Boulder and decided against it. I met her in the parking lot at Kohl's after not seeing her for a while. She explained that her trip to see proposed residences that her daughter Sonja and son-in-law Steve Conley had found her had too many OLD people in them and she just wasn't ready.

Coping with a troubling eye disease has limited Susanne to driving in daylight only. It still doesn't slow her down much.

She finally decided it would just become more difficult to move by waiting much longer. The availability of a townhome she finally rented near her daughter and son-in-law fits her desire for continued independence yet is very near them for company. Sonja and Steve both work for NOAA in Boulder.

We'll all miss her; please keep in touch because we can hope she will come back to Minneapolis for a visit. Susanne – you'll always have friends and places to stay in the Friendship Force Twin Cities Club. Ben has sent her address out to you and at a recent farewell Susanne was presented with a life membership to our club.