

From the Editor

When I was 19, I spent a year abroad in Freiburg, Germany. I had landed at that juncture of my life largely due to a mentor – a teacher who had taught me German from eighth through twelfth grade. Karin Haisig – “Frau”, as we lovingly referred to her – brought Germany into our classroom on the daily. Her energy seemed boundless. She endeared herself to the misfits – they always signed up for another year – and encouraged us all to keep trying to speak and write, despite our many – and often hilarious – mistakes. On day one, she spoke to us in her native tongue, always following up with the English. She told us that by the end of our first semester, we would be able to spell any word she threw at us. By laying the foundations of the language, we learned the “-ish” sound would always be spelled “-sch”, that all nouns were capitalized, and that the longest word (that she knew) in the German language had 52 letters. We were gobsmacked.

Through repetition, we started to learn what she was saying, without needing translation. Her ability to act out her words as she spoke, often animatedly, made it all much easier and quite entertaining. Our Midwest accents aside, we eventually learned to say first small phrases, then complete sentences. And, by sharing her upbringing with us, we dared to dream that we, too, could see Germany first-hand; I dreamed that I would someday be fluent.

That first year, I also started my own “business” – well, it was more of a “racket”. I sold Haribo Gummi Bären, 36 bags to a box, for \$0.50 per bag. From each box, I kept \$7.00. Actually, I never saw that \$7 after I handed the \$18 to Frau; it was conserved in an account for us to use to help pay our way to Germany on an exchange trip. I would be accosted between classes, often late to the next, while I dealt gummi bears from my locker. After four years, I had accrued enough to buy my own ticket overseas. I left Germany forever inspired.

I pursued German in college, majoring in German literature. My junior year I spent abroad. After two months, I received devastating news: my mentor, my friend, my Frau, had been killed in a terrible accident. At the time of her death, I was midway through a letter I was writing to her – all in German. I wanted her to feel pride for how she had encouraged me and helped me find my way. I was stunned, homesick, and directionless for a while. It wasn't until a visit from an aunt and uncle, who were touring Germany, paid me a visit, that my life got back on track. They pointed out that I was *living in Germany* (!), my surroundings were like those from a fairy tale, and it was my duty to honor Frau with my actions. In short, they reminded me how lucky I truly was to be so inspired.

I am reminded of this because of how many of you have once had a mentor, or been blessed to have more than one. Our trade lives on because of these special relationships, and not in spite of the fact they are gone. Their nurturing was intended to inspire not only you, but to endure for generations. Like many of you, I have carried Frau's spirit of mentorship forward through teaching and coaching. Every so often, I'm told I made a difference. It is enough, and it is our way to finally repay those who went before.

*In memory of Robert C. Klenda
May 30, 1936 – April 15, 2026*

Charlie

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