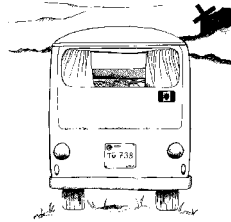


# Our Faithful Rusting Friend

by Gordon Laird



March 7, 2001

It was white and blue and had a lot of rust along the bottom of the doors. It was a 1966 Volkswagen Bus and it became the friend and workhorse of our family for the two and one-half years we lived in Germany.

The seven of us had just arrived from Canada two days before. We were staying in one room in a Pension in Kelsterbach, near Frankfort, Germany. I had left the family behind and was following up a lead in the newspaper, with the help of our landlord, and was beginning to learn the differences in cultures between Canada and Germany.

Our landlord explained the comment TUV with a date in 1975. I don't know what the initials meant to this date, but I soon understood that this was an important date. I was told that on this date the vehicle would have to be taken into and thoroughly inspected and everything brought up to date. The further away that date is, the greater value was the vehicle!

I first saw our Bus on a Saturday at the train station in Butzbach, north of Frankfort. The owner, Herr Jacobowicz, had picked me up at the station and driven me to his home in the Bus. The ceiling of the Bus was very brown and stained, and I learned the reason: this Bus had been the transportation for his string of nightclubs and had been used for transporting the dancing girls. The bill of sale shows pictures of beautiful and scantily clad women, and the names: Delecado-Cabaret-Bar and Litz-Tanz-Cabaret. Now I was hoping it would be used in transporting a minister and family on sabbatical!

Not much to look at from the outside, the inside was just what a family of seven needed. There was the front bench, a comfortable place for two people. Behind that was another bench for three people and then another for another three. I know that adds up to eight people, but that, realistically, was what it would hold. Perfect for seven! Behind the rear bench was a small area for luggage. There

were two doors on the right side to provide access for the back two benches. Visualize two barn doors which meet in the middle.

I had with me 50 Deutschmarks to put as a down payment on the Bus. Herr Jacobowicz was not pleased and explained that he was worried that I might not follow through in buying the bus and he would lose the other possible sales. I assured him I would be back Monday with the money. In my statement of assurance I used a very dramatic phrase: "In Canada we do business on a handshake!"

This was not as wild a statement as it sounds. In fact a few months before I had bought a house for the church, using a handshake. And the owner of the house would do it no other way!

But Herr Jacobowicz, the only Jewish person I ever met in Germany, became reflective and said, "My Mother said 'You can always trust the Germans', referring to the prevailing personal honour she found living in Germany. Then he said, significantly, that was 1931. It was left to me to guess how she learned otherwise.

Now I was to learn another custom strange to me. On my return on Monday with enough money withdrawn from a local branch of my German Bank, I found an insurance agent and was able to make arrangements. But Herr Jacobowicz told me that wouldn't do, because in Germany your vehicle is licenced in the place where you live. We were hoping to live in or near the University town of Tuebingen, but we didn't live anywhere yet!

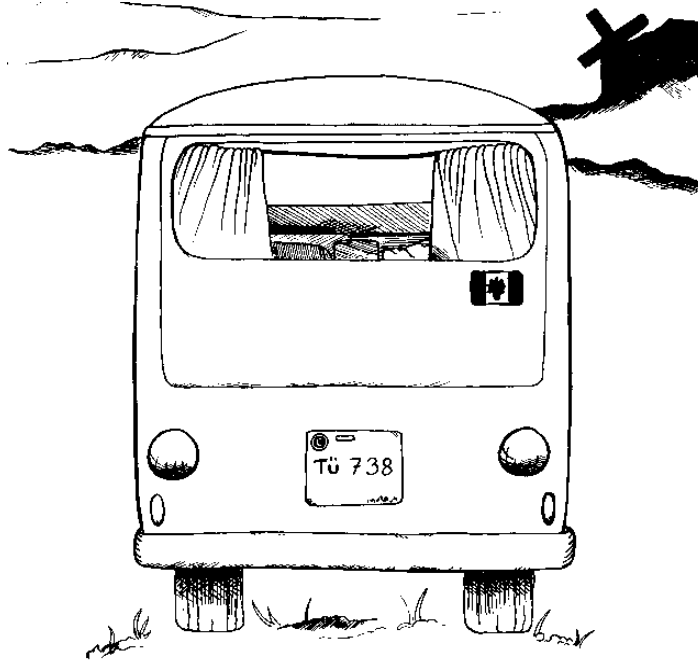
I was now thoroughly spent. I had made a valiant effort to make the arrangements for the car, with money and insurance. I could do no more. So I simply waited and said nothing. I waited for Herr Jacobowicz to speak.

"So you like to do business on a handshake, do you?" he said.

"Here, take my keys, drive the bus to Tuebingen, find a place to live, then license the car, phone me and tell me you have, then send my licence plates back to me. On the way, don't hit anything, or you will raise cost of insurance on all my cars!"

That is exactly what we did!

I drove back to the Pension in Kelsterbach in our own true friend, our 1966 Volkswagen, Nine-passenger, blue and white, rusty on the bottom, friend. I picked up Marilyn, Anne, David, Brian, Beverly and Anita, and our European adventure was underway!



Notice, in the picture drawn by our youngest daughter, Anita, the German licence plate, with our Tuebingen identifying number, the Canadian flag on the back, and the curtains for sleeping.

Yes, our rusty friend became our home in all our travels and took us to Spain and North Africa, to Ireland at one extreme, and Greece on the other. It took us to see the Pope in Rome, and Buckingham Palace in London.

And when we sold it two and one-half years later it was off to another adventure. The two young travelers who bought it were heading for Tibet!