

Earl's Diary - Thursday - May 23, 2013

Dear Loyal Readers,

Today was a travel day. We left Edwardsville at 9:30. The planned route was one of the interstates to Hannibal, MO. Instead we chose one of the backroads. A good choice it was! It was a beautiful drive on the Great River Road. The GRR meanders along the Mississippi River on the Illinois side. When I say meanders, that's exactly what it does. Some of the region's most dramatic scenery is nestled along a winding road north of Alton, Illinois. The road is a collection of state highways with various numbers as it goes up and down and around gentle curves. Every few miles a local village appears. The countryside is very green and lush. We passed by farms, all the way from St. Louis to Hannibal. It seems that every farm has a least one silo - Some even have 4 or 5. I wonder if that's a status symbol? I guess you might say this is midwest farm country!

On our 100 mile trip north we passed by many small villages that were away from large city towns. Many villages were just a small collection of a few local businesses. Some of these villages were too small to even have their names printed on maps: Alton, Calhoun County, Elsah, Godfrey, Grafton, Hartford, Jerseyville, Wood River to name just a few.

The Mississippi and Illinois Rivers were running very high. There must have been one large rain storm come through the area recently. As we passed through Grafton we noticed flood waters clear up to the road in many places. In one village a sign pointed to "public parking" and the drive ran off into the water. Not only was water clear up into the trees, but some low lying farm fields still have water on them or sloppy mud.

We were able to cross the Illinois River on a ferry at Brussels, Illinois as we continued our journey north. It must have been quite an interesting sight with both our Scamps on board the ferry!

I had an interesting experience this morning, but I'm going to let Michele tell you about it.

"I told Alan that if we saw an **Aldi** we had to stop! **Aldi** is a chain of small grocery stores found in Germany. I shop there each visit we make to Jessica's. I had heard that they opened up some stores in Illinois, so I was anxious to see how similar the US stores would be to the German stores. As luck would have it, while driving through Alton, Illinois there was an **Aldi** right on the main drag through town. I'm sure Earl must have thought we were crazy. I think he enjoyed the experience. As it turned out the store was set up exactly as it is in Germany. The first thing you notice is that there are no loose shopping carts clogging the parking lot...at **Aldi** the carts are right outside the store and they are hooked together with a chain/lock device. You must put a quarter in a slot to release one cart for shopping. When you are finished you return your cart and when you lock it with the others, a quarter comes out of the slot and is returned to you. The first thing you notice upon entering the store, is that there is a wide variety of items, but only two or three brands to choose from (one being their in-house brand, of course). The shelves run the length of the store and are not very tall...you can see over the shelves to the aisles on either side. When you check out you bag your own groceries, and if you use store bags (paper or plastic) you are charged for them. We simply put our purchases back into the cart without any bags, like most Germans

do, and then just put them into the frig and cabinets in the trailer when we were finished. There is one difference between here and Germany in the check out procedure that I noticed...In Germany, once they scan your items, they push them further down the table and you pack your own items in the cart...In the US, the table ends at the cash register and the cashier just slides each item right in the cart for you. When we finished our shopping, I told Earl he had just had a trip to Germany and he didn't even have to leave the U.S."

Tonight we are staying at an RV park (about 25 miles west of Hannibal) in Monroe, MO. Tomorrow we were planning on visiting Hannibal. However, Hannibal was hit by a tornado and fierce winds a few days ago. Our hosts at the RV park said the downtown area had not been completely cleaned up yet and many businesses are still without electricity and closed. Even the WalMart is closed! We decided this would not be a good time for tourists to be there. We may just lay low around here and see what there is to see from here.

My apologies, there are no pictures today. Thanks for coming along with me today. Bye for now - - Earl