



Different Strokes for Different Folks

by Freida Marie Taylor

These are often uttered words when confronted with something that just doesn't look or feel comfortable to us.

Living here in Belgium definitely makes you feel a bit narrow minded about being spoiled in America. Everyone says we are anyway, and I've lived here long enough to understand what they are saying. I'm also trying to compromise, adapt, and defend all at the same time!

My first days here made me wonder why I gave up the familiar for the unknown. As a woman, I take pride in my domestic abilities, and being a miniature wonder woman when it comes to taking charge. I was ready to "americanize" my new home.

My ride from the airport quickly put fear in my heart and a firm grip on the seat. I felt as if I had shrunk in size and was riding the autobaan with the "Matchbox" series. The autos are so little (and cute!) compared to our diesel trucks and full-sized luxury cars. The parking (always parallel) is designed for the small cars. A special tax is charged for full-size beasts from America, so you never see familiar models here.

My verbal passenger seat driving immediately kicked in with "did you see that guy! He didn't even stop before he pulled out of that street!" Of course had I hit him, I was at fault...it is legal and cars from the right have priority! And then why are we just sitting here at the red light, why don't you just go right? Ah ha! Another instant ticket for Taylor...it is illegal to make a right turn on red.

Here in Belgium there is a tax...translated it is a look and listen tax (kijk en luister geld). Rumor has it that it will go away soon. The owner of a vehicle pays a "listen" tax on his car radio once a year, as well as a "look" tax for the televisions in his home. This tax is a left-over from several years ago when there was only one radio and television station operated by the country. An english station challenged the monopoly by broadcasting from a large ship in international waters off the coast of Belgium. Now there are several stations to watch, as well as a wide variety of interesting radio stations. I've noticed that we are about a month behind in some of the shows and songs.

Also upon arrival I began to notice several other differences, the first being the temperature. In July it felt like October!! I have since learned to convert celcius into fahrenheit so I can really exaggerate when I see the temperatures! (9 divided by 5 times the celcius temp + 32) The normal range is from 20 to 80 here. I miss the ninety's with a matching humidity! I have also noticed the sun in the sky is always off to one side. We are 7 hours ahead of central time in America. It used to be 6 hours but during the war the Germans added one more hour. We also have Daylight Savings Time but on different days. It gets dark at 4:30pm and light at 8:30am in the winter. In the summer it is light around 5:30am and almost dark at 11pm. It really confuses the dinner schedule if you are used to using daylight as a timekeeper. I've also had a shock or two when looking at the digital clocks on the appliances. Military time is used and on occasion I get caught off guard with the time on the microwave when preparing meals.

The way to a man's heart is through his stomach, so I decided to activate the Betty Crocker program in me. I didn't see an oven, under the stove or in the wall. The microwave is a technical wonder here. It bakes, broils, grills, browns, defrosts (doesn't do dishes!) and makes that instant cup of coffee. I had never seen such a gadget, much less used one, so lets just say I became the person who could burn a pot of water.

The refrigerators here are the size of a dormitory appliance for good reason. The government rules that minimal preservatives are used in practically everything they eat so nothing keeps for very long. That is why those marvelous bakeries exist. The breads are wholesome and fresh, baked daily, with nothing added. There are bread vending machines stocked daily (like our snack machines) on corners and at the gas stations! The meats and luncheon meats have no preservatives and cannot be genetically altered (feeds or growth stimulation). The specialty meat shops slice and prepare quantities to order, three slices of this, two kilos of that, 150 grams of sandwich

spread. A trip to the quaint little family run businesses becomes a cultural necessity and a "community bonding" social call.

Depending on what's on the shopping list, an American can travel across the continent and usually find the same brand names in every state. I'm still searching for A-1 steak sauce, and beg for care packages from home with Excedrin aspirin, pancake syrup, and Orville Redenbacher microwave popcorn. Corn is grown here but only for chicken feed. When I can find fresh corn it is imported from southern France. There are dozens of differences when it comes to edible familiars. I could write volumes on these but to make a long story a bit shorter I will itemize a few of them so you can shake your head in wonder, and appreciate that stale box of saltines hiding in the back corner of your cabinet.

As a starter you must pay 20 frank (about 50 cents) for the use of a grocery cart which is returned when you put the cart back and re-insert the chain.

1. Fast food only exists in Pizza Hut Carry Out and McDonalds. I have found one Burger King and its in Germany! The belgian idea of fast food is a Frieten shop, or to us french fries. They come with lots of different meat sauce toppings and are so popular that highway signs have little friet packets on them telling you at the border into Belgium that there is a shop 500 meters ahead!

2. Milk is on the grocery shelf, not refrigerated. It is processed at Ultra High Temperatures (UHT) and only comes in 1 liter size. That's only about 4 cups. (about 51 cents) Milk and beer are sold in glass bottles in plastic crates of a dozen. A deposit is paid and you get that back when you bring the empties back.

3. Eggs are also on the shelf and are more commonly sold in boxes of 6, not a dozen. (dozen is about \$1.39)

4. You select your fresh loaf of bread from a variety of sizes and shapes found in wicker baskets. You slice it yourself at a preset slicer and bag it in the wax bag numbered the same as the number on the basket. (costs \$1.41)

5. Ground beef is mixed with veal, pork and very expensive pure. (\$2.10 per lb.) Horsemeat and rabbit is also available.

6. There are at least 10 varieties of potatoes, the main staple here. They are in different colored bags and the most popular one for fries is called Bintjes. If potatoes are so popular why haven't they heard of sweet potatoes? I found some around Thanksgiving in Brussels, but they were small and came from Israel!!

7. You cannot buy pharmaceutical items at the grocery store. You must go to the apoteek (pharmacy) to purchase them. (rubs, cough syrup, cold medicine etc)

8. There are over 500 cheeses from Belgium. It is very confusing to see all of them at once, and some have tastes and odors worse than your son's gym shoes!!

9. Breakfast consists of a boterham, or sandwich. No delicious ham and eggs, biscuits are unheard of. Cream of rice, or ricepap, is a snack. Waffles and pancakes or crepes are a mid afternoon tea or coffee break treat. Syrup of any kind is impossible to find (I'd give my arm for Aunt Jemima maple syrup) and the delicious waffles, etc. are served with brown sugar, fruit, ice cream or whipped cream instead.

10. A work week here is only 36-38 hours. Shops close around 6-7pm. They are closed on Mondays and Sundays, and are closed for the lunch hour. Cafes and pubs are open on Sundays.

11. A cup of coffee costs about \$1.70 with no refills. A small coke costs about \$1.22. A glass of water is never free and costs almost \$1.00. Ice cubes are very rare here. You must ask for them, and several places don't offer ice. A pack of cigarettes cost \$3.00.

12. Your mail is delivered to your door, but pick up isn't offered without a tip to the walking/bicycling carrier.

13. Doctors still make house calls here!!

14. The calendar here starts on Monday, not Sunday as ours does. I was always a day late for everything!!

15. Sunday is a day of rest (so everyone goes to the cafes!). You arent allowed to mow grass or make disturbing racket for your neighbors. It is a city ordinance, and



Photos from Brussels and around Ninove, Freida's hometown. (photos by Freida Taylor)

disobeying will guarantee a quick visit from the local law enforcement fellows.

16. Tuesday is Market Day. It compares to a flea market, but offers more of a grocery shopping spree with the extra stops next door. Everything is offered at little booths along the Centrumlaan, from breads, veggies, fish and meat to shoes, tablecloth on the roll, house cleaning goodies and clothing. A rectangle pillow doesn't exist here. The bed pillows are square and all accessories are metric as are the clothing and shoe sizes. That is disturbing when your size jumps from single digits to double digits!!

17. Friday is the traditional house-cleaning day. Women are seen everywhere scrubbing their front windows and mopping their sidewalks. Yes, that's right, the law here says that you clean the walk in front of your home. You have probably heard the term "scrubby Dutch" and this is where it comes from. I have not adapted to the point of being seen scrubbing my sidewalk, different strokes applies here!! I had an equally hard time becoming acquainted with the broom and mop! You're probably thinking negative thoughts about me and cleaning, but that's not it at all. The brooms here are little rubber things with short rubber teeth. I had never seen one. The mops

are squeegees on the end of a handle. You wrap a specially made cloth around it and there you are. I sank to the lowest level of humility. I had to be shown (by a guy) how to use the broom and mop!! Ah, such is life.

18. Laundry is done at night here. The electricity costs half after 9pm and usually costs about \$123 a month. My mom used to use front loading washers. I grew up with the age of agitators that beat that dirt out of those clothes in half the time. We argued about the antiquity of the machine to the point of a special "show me" trip to the appliance store. I was proved wrong and front loading machines are all they have here. So if you find that other dirty sock, forget about adding it to the load. Please don't take this all as negative, but as the learning curve. In appreciation for what I once had, I give tribute. I also turn my head and deviously smile. My life is full of experiences, good and bad, As a chocoholic, I now have access and an endless supply to the world's greatest chocolates made. Godiva, Cote'd Or, Callebaut, and Leonidas originate right here in Belgium!!

Tot de volgende keer,
(till the next time)
Taylor

Elders To Attend Easter Party

Sherry Harkey, Title VI Head Cook for the Iowa's has invited the **Sac and Fox Elders** to attend their **Elders Easter Party** to be held on
Wednesday, April 4, 2012

Lunch will be provided as well as an **Easter Egg Hunt** with various prizes being provided.

More fun and entertainment to be forthcoming. I will be taking 2 van loads to the activity holding approximately 17 elders. Sign up will be made in person or by phone on a first come, first serve basis.

Contact info: Anita Stevens, Interim Elders Coordinator,
918-968-3526 or 1-800-259-3970, ext. 1054.

If I am not in, please leave a message so that I will have your request on record.

**Sac and Fox Nation
Veterans
Organization
Meeting
March 13, 2012
5:00 pm
Elders Bldg
Stroud
Always on the 2nd
Tuesday of each month
unless otherwise posted**

