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Interviewee (print) Interviewer (print)

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the home of Homer Rhinehart

on the date(s) of March 20, 1996

for the oral history collection being compiled by Dr. Marshall.

Homer W. Rhinehart Date: 3-20-96
Interviewee's Signature

Address 313 Gadsden St.
Piedmont AL 36272

Phone (205) 447-6981

Christa Rhinehart Date: 3-20-96
Interviewer's Signature

Address Rt. 3 Box 110
Piedmont AL 36272

Phone (205) 447-9036

INTERVIEWEE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: Homer Winford Rhinehart M/F: M

Address: 313 Gadsden St Piedmont AL 36272

Phone number(s): (205) 447-9036

Approximate age or date of birth: Feb. 13, 1919 77 years old

Mothersname: Nancy Alliffare Rhinehart

Father's name: Luther Don Rhinehart

Places lived and when: Rock Run, AL until 1978 → moved to Piedmont AL

Education: Sixth grade

Religion: Protestant, Baptist (Rock Run)

Business, political and social memberships (past and present): VFW - Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, Mason

Present occupation: retired

Former occupations: textile worker - cotton mill

Special Skills: Carpenter work, electrical work

Major Accomplishments: _____

National Events in which interviewee has participated: _____

Local Events in which interviewee has participated: _____

National born U.S. citizen? Yes/No Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No

Country from which he/she emigrated: _____

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in the possession of the interviewee: photos, newspaper articles (English & German)

Individuals recommended by the interviewee who might be candidates for an oral history interview: _____

Additional information: _____

Auf Wiedersehen, Sweetheart

Forty years and an ocean apart . . .

By Catherine Downing
Star Staff Writer

They met that summer of 1945. He was an American soldier. She was an Austrian college student. Vienna sprawled in ruins around them. She passed him one evening, as he sat in a sidewalk cafe. He called to her. She came, glad to speak the English she was studying. It began.

Homer Rhinehart was a country fellow. His home was a frame house with a wide front porch in Rock Run, Ala., in Cherokee County, about a million miles from Vienna, Austria. Homer was married. He was in the Army because the world had just been through hell. He was in Vienna because that was where the Army had sent him.

Vienna in the summer of 1945 was an open wound. Food was almost impossible to get. Friends and relatives were dead or missing in the chaos that was Hitler's legacy to Europe.

Something about the young G.I. sitting cockily with friends that summer night touched Gertrude John. The young fraulein, blonde and bright, was perhaps beyond weary with war and ruin. The soldier, sleepy-eyed, with broad lips that smiled easily, was that first night, someone to laugh with, someone to smile at over a stein of beer, a way to forget the echoes of goose-stepping and bombs.

Later he was something more. They saw each other every day. There were still dances in Vienna and cafes and places to walk along the Danube. In spite of having only one pair of stockings that year, Gertrude was beautiful to Homer. Before

he left Vienna, on the last day of July 1946, she was carrying his child.

IN THE VIENNESE winter, George John was born, the tiny image of his American father. Gertrude sent one letter to Rock Run. In it was a lock of the baby's hair and a small picture. She waited for return mail that never arrived.

"I was a proud person," she says in softly accented English. "I thought he didn't care and wasn't interested."

Back at home, Homer was working at Standard Coosa Thatcher, putting in his 40 years. He got that first letter from Gertrude, held that lock of baby curls in his big hands and wrote back to the mother of his son in faraway Vienna.

"I knewed she was gonna have a hard time raising that boy by herself in Austria," Homer says 46 years later, from

the couch of his Piedmont home. He wrote to encourage her to send love, but she never answered those letters. For years he wrote, never receiving another picture or news of the little boy or his mother.

Gertrude married. The attempt at happiness ended in divorce and she married again. As little George asked about his father, Gertrude told him that the American man was dead. Later, when he was more mature, she told him the truth—that his father was alive as far as she knew in Rock Run, America.

WHEN HER SECOND husband died in 1987, George told his mother it was his time to know his father. "He said, 'Now I go to the States and meet my daddy.'"

■ See Couple/3D

Bed-and-breakfast inns offer hospitality

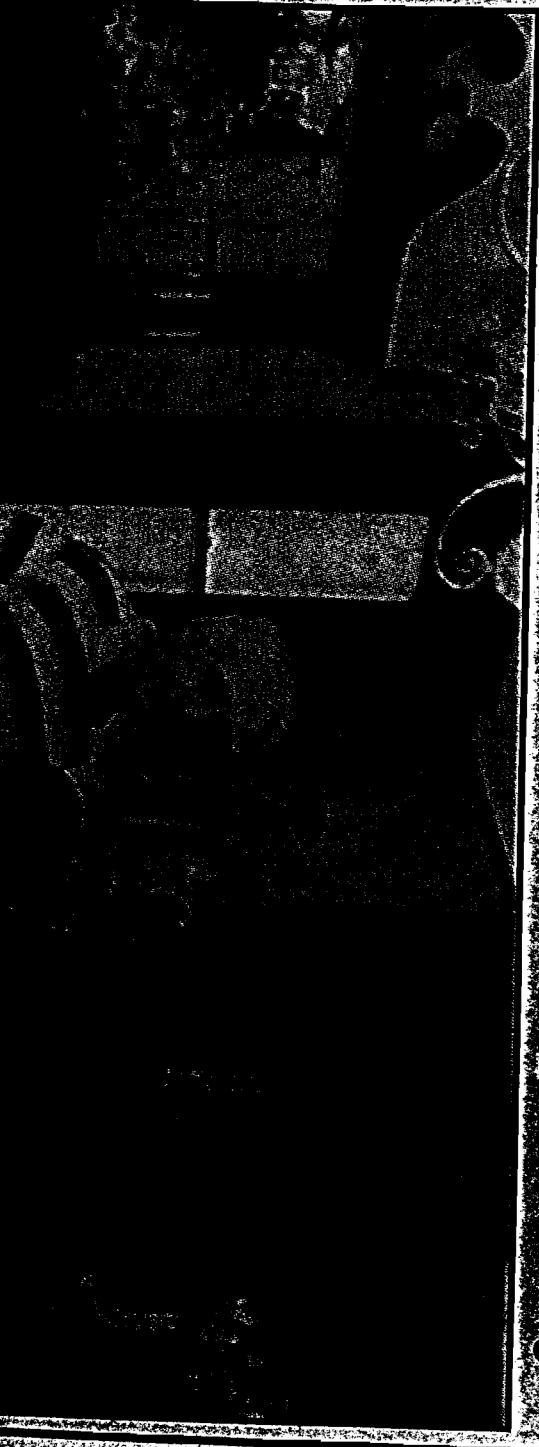
From Staff & Wire Reports

When the American tourist met the European bed-and-breakfast, it was love at first sight and why not?

What better antidotes to workaday stress than some "warm fuzzies"—flowered chintz, buttered scones, friendly hosts.

Quick to spot a potentially lucrative trend, would-be innkeepers in this country hot-footed it to the nearest Laura Ashley store and began converting spare bedrooms, garages, barns and carriage houses into inviting getaways.

As the numbers of B&Bs swelled, from 1,000 in 1980 to an estimated 20,000 today—including two in Anniston—what was once a quirky alternative for the intrepid traveler has become downright commonplace. In some cases, uncommonly



Couple

From Page 1D

George was a successful 41-year-old computer software salesman in Vienna in early 1988 when he came to Gadsden Street in Piedmont with his wife, Ann, to meet his father. The house was full of Homer's three sons and daughter from two failed marriages, and with their spouses and children as well as Homer's siblings. Homer stood outside, yating alone.

"George had half a second outside with his daddy and they were in love," Gertrude says. "He planned to stay one day, and I said, 'Well, call me.' He called and said, 'I stay one week, and I knew everything was OK.'"

George invited Homer to come to Vienna, Gertrude says. "I said, 'You pick him up at the airport.'"

George did that and took his father home with him to the family's country home in an Austrian mountain village. Three days of phone calls to Gertrude were unsuccessful in convincing her to see Homer. She was shy, hesitant to turn back to that other time in her life.

"Those days were very different," she says now. "I did things when I might not, never would do if things were changed."

FINALLY, GERTRUDE visited her son — their son — to see Homer again. She waited in the garden. Homer went out to her. He sat on a garden bench beside her at once in his best northeast Alabama accent said, "How you doing?"

"She said, 'I don't feel so good,'" so just reached over and gave her a big kiss," Homer says through a face-splitting grin. That kiss must have been all it took. He

stayed a month. Soon after, his return home, Gertrude flew here to meet Homer's family, see his home, spend time with him on the backwater.

"So here I was on the plane, an old woman, and I didn't know how things would be to me," she says. "I booked for six weeks but extended for five months. It was wonderful."

Program resurrects



The Anniston Star

A happy ending for a happy couple makes news — on two continents

Today Homer and Gertrude are still together. Married. When media friends of George found out about the happy-ending war affair, the Austrian papers covered the couple. Television stations asked to attend the Sept. 8 wedding in Vienna. CNN was there.

Things are different. "Yeah, hard-pressed to find.

she's old," Homer says, laughing with a wince as his wife coyly pokes a knuckle into his upper arm. The arm flies up around her shoulders for a snuggle. The two are older, yes, and Homer has cancer. But a healthier-looking 73-year-old man you'd be about me."

This couple is bound to find the good in every step they take together now. She says his illness is the main reason she married Homer. They began talking about getting married back in 1988, and every visit brought them closer. But Homer held out because of his cancer.

"I was always afraid I'd be sick and sick. I'll have to go," she says, referring to her limped visits as a tourist. "I don't want to leave him."

As a hedge against the conversation in Homer and Gertrude's Piedmont home turning too sentimental, Homer says, "I tried her all different ways. She did all right in the tryout," he says, grinning sideways at his bride of six weeks. "I feel good. I found out she's the one I need."

Gertrude watches her husband walk across the house to get the scrapbook of their second round of romance. "He said to me, 'I don't marry you now because I'm a hospital case.' But I told him it wouldn't be love if I left him sick."

After 46 years, the soldier and his Austrian sweetheart are together.

"It's even nicer now than when we were younger," she says. "We have no problems. If you get older, you learn a lot. What's important and not important. When you're young, you're more selfish."

"I haven't got old yet," Homer interjects.

"No," his bride says smiling as she takes his hand. "I was talking about me."

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THE BAR

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Word Spellings & Definitions

Georg John - Homer and Gertrude's son.

Ann John - Georg's wife.

Christoph & Katharina John - Georg and Ann's children.

David Rhinehart - Homer's son from a previous marriage.

Doug Rhinehart - Another one of Homer's sons from a previous marriage.

Christa Rhinehart - Interviewer and David Rhinehart's daughter.

Steve John - Gertrude's son from a previous marriage.

Gleichenbach - Small mountain village where Gertrude has a home.

Homer W. Rhinehart

Table of Contents

b. 2/13/19 - Rock Run, AL

1. Background Information: where he grew up, went to school, activities, etc.
2. Army Experience
3. First meeting with Gertrude
4. Return home from war II 1944-46 66th Int. Div , 42nd Marine Corps
- France -
5. Contact with Gertrude, meeting his son for the first time
6. First trip back to Austria to meet Gertrude and family
7. Gertrude's first trip to Homer's home in the United States
8. Wedding in Vienna
9. Living a life together in two separate countries
10. Cultural differences
11. Conclusion