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Growing up in St Gallen

I was privileged to spend my formative years in the beautiful City of St Gallen which is laden with history and culture. Many places, events and customs come to my mind – here are just a few snippets:

The impressive baroque cathedral was a central part of my early life. Coming from staunch Catholic stock, that's where our family went to church. Twice every Sunday and on two weekday mornings; also most evenings in May to celebrate the Virgin Mary and every day during Advent (December), when we braved the cold dark winter mornings and went to mass (Rorate). We were often joined by a group of similarly devoted friends. It gave us a special sense of belonging, and contributed to my love of singing. The amazing manuscripts in the **Abbey Library (Stiftsbibliothek)** did not excite us kids too much. What fascinated us there was the Egyptian princess, a mummy from the 7th century BC. Apparently, she is still resting there and no doubt still delights today's children.

We attended a State primary school, but went to a Catholic secondary school for two or three years, called "**Flade**" (Pie). That's a nickname for the flat hats the pupils used to wear earlier. There was strict segregation of the sexes. The girls were taught by nuns. I still see them in their flowing habits with stiff headgear, which seemed to be so uncomfortable. Many formidable women were amongst them – and some who really should not have been teachers. Just as well the kids were not too cruel in those days. More memories of nuns: Our family's Sunday afternoon walk often took us to a nunnery which overlooks the town: **The convent of Notkersegg**. The nuns there are in a closed religious order and their monastery is surrounded by a stone wall. They pray for their fellow human beings and praise God for 24 hours in the day, and they work within their community to make it as self sufficient as possible. The nuns were invisible to us ordinary folk and very mysterious. We could visit their church though and we listened to their prayers. It was a monotonous and reassuring sound. As a special treat, we were allowed to buy some of their biscuits – lovingly called 'Nonnefürzli' (nun's farties). You talked to the nun who sold them through a rotating shutter, but never saw her. I gather there are still seven nuns praying at Notkersegg now – ranging from 33 to 96 years of age.



Children's Parade in St. Gallen
<http://www.myswitzerland.com/en-us/kinderfest-in-st-gallen-sg.html>

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Getting to more secular aspects of St. Gallen, I think of the **Bratwurst**, a veal sausage- first mentioned in the 15th century. It's the best Bratwurst you find anywhere in Switzerland. In order to savour it properly, you are advised not to have mustard with it. Some outlets refuse to serve you mustard even if you ask for it.

One of the main early industries of St. Gallen was its embroidery. For us kids, it became most visible at the '**Kinderfest**' (Children's Parade), a two-yearly event for all the children of the town. Every girl wore a pretty white embroidered dress (boys had colourful shirts and shorts). The parade of all these kids, interspersed with bands, seemed to go on for hours. Afterwards, we met at the festival grounds, performed our dances and music, and got treated to – a Bratwurst of course.

The Children's Parade also reminds me of another characteristic of St. Gallen: It does **rain** a lot. The festival often had to be postponed. As there was no satellite forecast, it could only be decided early on the day whether to go ahead. Three canon shots, fired from a hill, announced the good news!

There is heaps more to know about St. Gallen. Why don't you find out for yourself on your next Swiss trip!

By Nelly Steinemann

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