

# *At the sharp end*

tales from the field

## **ASK A SILLY QUESTION**

This story comes from a time long ago (the seventies actually), when air travel was so expensive that it was beyond the means of most travellers, including the young people on our first youth exchange trip with Germany. Because of this, a tortuous 24 hour journey by coach, train, ferry and train was needed to get from Cardiff to Stuttgart, our twin city. Perhaps I should add at this point that the co-leader of the group was our notable Member of Parliament for Cardiff South & Penarth - Alun Michael.

The journey there was uneventful enough - unless you count our brush with Irish politics/religion. One of our boys got into conversation with a group of lads from Belfast on the ferry to Ostend. He came back with a bemused look. He had been asked by one of the Irish boys whether he was Catholic or Protestant. Not knowing their particular affiliation he replied warily "I'm nothing really". The boy from Ireland glared at him and said "Atheist B....rd".

But it was on the way home that our problems really started. Two of the group members, both young women, when faced with a range of new experiences, new faces and new places, had spent much of the exchange in a haze of blissful confusion. After bidding fond farewells to our new German friends and hosts at Stuttgart station, we all boarded our train bound for Ostend. But as the train gently pulled away from the platform, who should be standing behind our German friends but the two girls, beaming and waving along in unison.

Things seemed to happen in slow motion - the look of horror on our faces, frantic pointing at the two girls, and dawning realisation on the faces of the Germans that not all of their new-found friends were returning to Wales. The two were duly bundled into the car of one of the leaders and a 100mph chase ensued. Luckily the autobahn and railway ran somewhat parallel and eventually, two stops, 200 miles and 3 hours later, the girls were reunited with the rest of the group at Mannheim station.

Their testing of my youth work patience didn't end there however. As we waited on the train at Dover station for the journey to Waterloo, I noticed a lone suitcase sitting on the platform. I rushed out and managed to retrieve it just before the train pulled out. After placing it under the nose of each individual on three separate occasions asking "Is this your suitcase?", and receiving a negative reply, I again returned to the two girls with the same question. The one looked puzzled for a while and said "Its not mine, but I think it's hers". Turning to her friend in exasperation I said, "I thought you said this wasn't your suitcase". "It's not", she replied. "I borrowed it from my sister's boyfriend."

**JOHN MOORE, Happily Retired Youth Worker.**

Do you have a humorous youth work story to tell? If so, Ymlaen would like to hear from you. Contact Liz Sharp at the address on page two.