

## Winter

As I am writing this, I have just come back from trying to keep a dental appointment in Canton, Texas about 15 miles away. I hate sitting in the dentist chair, much less for a crown, and much less having to pay for it. But at least we do have dentists and doctors, and normally cars and weather to get there.

But last night we had one of those rare ice storms, a very mild one at that, but enough to cover the cars and the road anyway. Had to use a water hose to "de-ice" the car after first having to back up blind in the driveway to get to a faucet, but at least there was running water. Next backed down the hill to the small farm road, then the farm to market road finding it still frozen. Wondering whether to go on, used that marvelous invention, the cell phone, to check on the roads and decided to call the whole thing off.

Oh how different winter was in Triangel. Northern Germany is on a latitude even with northern Canada, somewhere around Hudson Bay. Daylight in winter would be short, with first light somewhere around 10:00 in the morning, dusk somewhere around 3:00 p.m., with the sun making a very shallow pass across the horizon, when we did have sun, which was rare in winter. Snow would come early, and come to stay. But I do not remember much ado about it. Life would go on as usual, and I do not remember missing school because of the weather. I guess when the weather was too bad, we just did not go, and that was it.

We certainly had no weather forecasts or weather alerts, or notices of school closings. There was no telephone or radio, not in any of the houses in the village that I know of, for I never heard the word telephone or radio. And we must have been sick now and then and missed school, but not having or going to school must have been no big thing. There certainly was no such thing as parents having to write an excuse, and besides that we had no paper. Everything was onto a slate that would be scratched with a scribe and washed clean later. I surely would have remembered my parents having to write an excuse on my slate.

Life would revolve around little things. As Christmas approached we would bring in some small pine from the garden and start decorating, hanging pine cones, attaching real candles by dripping a little wax on the branches and quickly sticking the small candles down until the wax was cool. We would hang stars and other small beads and other decorations, maybe even a little of the shiny tinfoil strips that could be found now and then around the countryside, even though we knew it was the chaff dropped by the American or British planes to fool German radar. I of course did not even know that I had been born in America, but I now know it was nothing but wise precaution on the part of my parents not to tell me anything at all about America at that time, not with Hitler around.

With everything outside covered with snow, any piece of green was welcome, and we would weave decorations out of any kind of evergreen shrub, preferably if it had red berries on it. There would always be some advent calendars hung in the windows, and

one little "window" would be popped out each day to see what beautiful picture lay behind it, till it would be Christmas, and the big "window" would be opened to let the light also shine through it. And with no peeking ahead of time, it was a marvelous way to teach patience.

Food would come from the large pantry and the large cellar. In the pantry would be the bread which was periodically being baked, together with the small supply of other staples, supplemented with such fruit and vegetables as we had been able to dry in the summer. In the cellar would be vegetables and fruit that had been canned. There was a large pile of sharp sand into which carrots and beets had been carefully pushed in to allow them to keep. Outside was snow covered cabbages which would be harvested throughout the winter.

When the weather would be a little better we would go out on the lake that was inside the park area of the large landed estate that formed the heart of the village. It was really private property, but everybody, mostly us children, would nevertheless sneak through the fence and go out on the ice and have fun and play games. There would be a few skates but not many. The skates were of the type one would clamp onto the soles of the shoes and would sooner or later tear up the shoes. I had never owned any skates, in the beginning it was because such luxuries were simply not available. Later as my parents were working on getting back to Texas it was because we would not be needing skates in Houston. I now believe I had no skates solely because my parents were of thrifty German stock.

But even in the middle of the winter we would go out and look at nature. There was always the large woods that went by the name of "Dragen", wherever that name may have come from. We would see lots of animal tracks and birds, and now and then a rabbit and sometimes a deer. We would go out on the ice on the large flooded meadows of the two meandering rivers, the Aller and the Ise, that were the center of our world, being careful to avoid the thin ice around the hidden course of the rivers themselves.

And I remember the almost frozen beautiful yellow butterfly lying on the path next to the show, and picking it up, and feeling sorry for it, and my dad trying to explain to me, as a child, that there comes a time for all things to end. That this was the way of nature, and that nature, and everything in it, was God.