

Weihnachtsbaum, candles and snow globes: holidays from Germany to America

by Jules Zipp

Aglow with soft firelight and warmth, the living room of Jasper resident Undine Price invites guests into a comforting but different world. Walking through the front door, a wormhole is opened and the room's ambiance resembles a home in Germany. Underneath a massive wooden cuckoo clock, six unique snowmen figurines stand on a white doily atop the fireplace mantel. A small evergreen tree with red berries and frosted pine cones resides adjacently. And another white tree light decorates the middle of the mantel, beside a nutcracker snow globe.

Dozens of lit candles fill the room with an indistinguishable pleasant scent of possibly a mix of cinnamon, clove, apples, citrus and pine. Price grows nostalgic as she remembers her childhood days in Leonberg, Germany. She fondly remembers the winter holiday in her native country as a time of pretty winter snow and family togetherness. She emphasized that everyone was nicer this time of year. "Christmas was the best day of the year, always. Because my Papa had to be always nice to us, because he was not always nice. But

at Christmastime, he was always nice and we played games and it was such a family event. And my mom decorated the house pretty nice. Made good food. Ahhhh, she made the Best Food Ever! Mmmm, yeah. It was awesome," Price gushed.

As a young girl, Price remembers the Adventskranz, a ring of fir branches with four candles, one lit each week of Advent. Price's family also celebrated with a live Weihnachtsbaum (Christmas Tree), illuminated with burning candles. The song *O Tannenbaum* actually refers to an evergreen fir tree and does not translate in German to Christmas tree. On December 24, Price's mother also added lametta (tinsel), colored balls and keepsake ornaments.

Price explained Weihnachten (Christmas Eve) was the main Christmas celebration, when the Christmas tree was traditionally brought into the house. Price remembered going into her room as a kid after putting the tree up. Her parents told her and her brother that Christkind (Christ Child) and Weihnachtsmann (Santa Claus) were coming to deliver presents. She says although it was

magical at the time, she was traumatized when she found out around age 9 that her parents had told a fairy tale.

"It was horrible when I found out the first time. That my parents always told me a story that wasn't true. Ah, it broke my heart because I loved it. It wasn't real. There weren't Weihnachtsmann or the Christkind. They were from the parents. It was really painful. So I actually decided that I will not do that to my kids. I'm not telling them that there's a Santa Claus in the air. He's not getting the credit for the presents that I had to buy."

She considers herself Christian but doesn't celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ as December 25. She asserts that the birth date of Jesus is "not in the bible." According to the Biblical Archaeology Society, biblical scholars agree that December 25 is likely not the birthday of Jesus. Most Christians now celebrate December 25 as the birthday of Jesus Christ because of Roman Emperor Constantine I. The Holy Roman Empire included Germanic tribes, many of which celebrated winter-solstice rituals from December 17 through 25, including the lighting of the Yule log and

decorating with evergreens. It's believed that the emperor inserted the birth of Jesus into this time period in an attempt to convert his subjects to Christianity.

With her own family, Price calls the holiday season *Winter Family Fest*. To her, it's a festive time of family, warming light and plenty of baked goods. No Weihnachtsbaum will be added to her Jasper home. She ended up in Jasper, after living in eight states throughout the U.S. At age 21, Price met 20-year old Chris, from Kentucky, while he was serving in the army at a German base. They married less than three months later at a mass marriage ceremony in Denmark. Price said getting married in Germany was an expensive and difficult process that took 6 weeks.

When American military bases started to close in Germany, they moved to Mobile, Alabama when Price was 28. They already had one son who was born in Germany, and Price was pregnant with her second child. She said the heat of the south, especially while pregnant, was a nightmare. There was no air conditioning. Adding in a profound culture shock, Price was immediately homesick.

"I cried and cried. I couldn't believe I couldn't go home again," Price lamented. "Everything was gone. I would never get to see my mom. It was horrible."

Her daughter Jenny was born in October, 1993. As a government contractor, Chris worked as an airplane mechanic. Price last visited Germany in 2000, two years before her third daughter Christine (Tini) was born in 2002. Although America is now home and, she still misses Germany and her parents. They speak often on the phone, but she worries about her mother.

"She wishes I would come back. When you leave the country, it's like you're gone for good," Price said. "I get homesick a lot on Facebook when I see German posts," Price said.

The German-American deals with her melancholy by reminding herself of home with items such as a 30-year old German sweater she still wears. Good German coffee she orders online and familiar recipes her mom made around the holidays especially reminds her of home.

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Salem United Church of Christ Christmas Schedule

Sunday, December 23rd

Birthday Party for Jesus - 9:00 am
Regular Worship Service - 10:00 a.m.

Monday, December 24th

Candlelight Service - 9:30 p.m.
202 E 4th Street, Huntingburg, IN



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