



This Christmas letter is at least being written to you on the second day of Christmas, finally, so it counts as a Christmas letter then. This 'USA adventure' of mine sure is keeping me busier than I expected, but it is fun and it's worth it. I can now say I am 55% American and not just 51% (although there are some here who say they can detect a German influence in my tongue).

I've enjoyed the changing of scenery here in Manistee; going from warm catamaran sailing on Lake Michigan to collecting the red leaves of Indian summer and chopping down my own tree for the first Christmas in America I can recall. I've found time to do things I don't get to or have the length of time for. I was the catcher on a local softball team. The Manistee News Advocate printed a few of the cartoons I drew for the editorial page. Got a couple of days sailing on the catamaran. Would've been more if it hadn't sailed off by itself and wrecked itself, but got it fixed again. Swam

(and shampooed) in Lake Michigan almost daily up till the end of October. Had a lead roll in the horror farce "It's a Scream" on the Ramsdell Theater stage. I toured a few of the lesser towns and villages of Manistee county and also want to go skiing at the local resorts. And I can follow the gradual developments of the local politics, such as the planning of the controversial mega-large new power plant.

The first half of the year I still was in Berlin; that seems so remote now. My stay in America started in July with the big family reunion on the occasion of the burial of my grandparents' urns in the town where they had gotten started. It certainly was a touching moment, I'm sure many of you who were there will never forget, as 'Mom & Dad' were lowered into the earth by their sons and daughter.

Ruth should have been with me then, but a knee infection had kept her in



Berlin a few weeks longer. I picked her up then at the end of the month in Chicago. She is enrolled at the Manistee high school, where she enjoys 11th grade Psychology and English as well as Tennis. In September she moved in with Michelle who is a grade ahead of her. Michelle is David's girlfriend so the three of them spend a lot of time together when David is up from Eastern Michigan University about once a month, because he has to work at K-mart to keep his job there.

Speaking of jobs, I'm thankful for the arrangement with my Berlin employer 4-text for sending me translation projects over the Internet for the duration and welcoming me back in Berlin when I return. Most of my other working hours are spent then selling appliances and tools at the Sears store in Manistee. Each customer is a new little adventure and it's a good way of getting to know the local population.

But one adventure I wasn't really planning for, yet that has gotten me quite involved is my romance with Edie (short for Edith). She is a teacher in Onekama. We met on the Internet. Thanks to Match.com we found we had a lot in common, including interest in taking Swing dance lessons together, taking walks in the country, attending plays

and concerts and going to church alternatively and other social functions. By the way, I can't help being repeatedly surprised how people here all seem to know one another. It was understood from the beginning that our relationship would be only temporary. Yet it is wonderful now, even though we know we will miss each other after I return to Berlin January 10th.

So, greetings to all I've spent time with in 2003 and to all I will spend time with in 2004!



Edie and me with our Christmas tree

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