

Going Home for the Holidays

By Dennis Knight

I asked my good friend and neighbor to think back to a time she cherishes, and to a place occupied by her father (*Vater*), her mother (*Mutter*) and her grandmother (*Großmutter*.) This is her story...

Outside in Essen the air is crisp, but indoors it is warm and rich with fragrances. *Mutter* is baking rolls and cookies of every sort, *stollen* with fruit and marzipan, and delicious gingerbread, what we call *lebkuchen*. *Großmutter* is roasting the goose for the feast. But no goose for me, *danke*, because when I was very small, a fowl experience (that's my little joke) made me renounce anything with feathers. My parents honor my pact, so, for me, it will be *wienerschnitzel*.

It is *Heiligabend*, Christmas Eve, and to an eight year old, *wunderbar*. Just this morning *Vater* brought in the fresh green fir, decorated it with ornaments and candles, and arranged the nativity scene below it for the prettiest *Tannenbaum* in all Germany.

My parents teach me to be frugal, ask for little and respect my things, and I know how hard my father has worked to provide them. But I'll admit *Großmutter* does spoil me, and I secretly turn to her when I covet a little something my parents think I can live without. Sometimes I get her in trouble.

Later tonight, we will dress in our Christmas finest and walk the blocks to midnight Mass at our church of Saint George. *Großmutter* says it will be late hours for such a little girl, but my family loves the sacred traditions and I feel honored they will treat me like a big girl tonight.

My cousin, a boy about my age in another town, is the owner of a new pair of leather, fur lined gloves. What a fine, grown up way to keep your hands comfy, and I confess a yearning for a pair of my own. *Vater* says my knitted mittens are very nice and will keep me just as warm. The gloves are at the top of my list for *Weihnachtsmann*, the fellow you call Santa Claus, but I haven't much hope.

Christmas Eve is a special time in Germany, and since I am the only child in our household, I am the center of attention. There are beautifully wrapped gifts around the tree for me, and a special toy, too large to wrap but with a bow. It is a dollhouse filled with the finest furniture. I can imagine crawling in and living there myself.

I have opened my other gifts and they are all very nice, but no gloves for me. I think *Vater* senses I am let down. He put his loving big arm around me and suggested I go to my dollhouse, check the bedroom suite, and take a peek in the wardrobe. Lo and behold, it holds the most exquisite pair of leather, fur lined gloves in all of Germany. What a lovely *Weinachten* for *ein kleines Mädchen*.