

Reichenberg, December 1996

Dear friends,

Christmas is coming and into our own and everybody else's turmoil there comes the wish for a moment of stillness to look what's there. Christmas and the pull to reach you initiates it.

So here it is: To start from the bottom of the age ladder:

Thimo, now 8, ~~is the creator of the pictures I send along~~ He is a wonder of quick grasp and power of imagination and expression = soul, but he also is a wonder of change of weather: One minute balming sun, the next thunder and lightening with heavy rains. The scale of feeling is dramatic which is not so surprising considering the fact that all his family has vanished: two years ago his father, this year his grandmother (mother's side) and his mother. Now we are like Huckleberry Finn's Widow Douglas or Tom's Aunt Polly where they have to behave constantly. Thimo and I could see right away the parallel when we came upon it. We like each other anyway

Bumbi - Emanuel is developing to be a somewhat serious scholar, next to the essential soccer 3 times a week: He is heading for the last exam and woke up to find the topics of school considerably interesting. He is in the process of writing a special paper on my grandfather's time as an ambassador at the Vatican during the withdrawal of the Germans in Italy. It was a dramatic Moment. And Ome is reading Italian books with dictionaries to channel the Italian viewpoint into this opus. Emanuel has a less laden heart in these historical matters than we. That gives him a fresher outlook.

Benjamin spent the year to make a ten minute film. It was his very first film. Not a video. No experience, no money, but lots of friends who acted for "nothing": a professional actor, he got a beautiful painting of Benjamin, Thimo and a little girl who were the little angels in the picture.

The story was about a scientist who drives in a car dictating a letter to a colleague of his in the triumph of his scientific righteousness mastering of reality. In this grand feeling he gets bolder and bolder taking the curves up a small pass while a little girl with a doll and a boy make their way through the thicket of the underbrush of the woods in the hills and happen to come to the road right behind a curve. The girl looks right and left and crosses, but the man in the car has

no chance to react. He sees her too late. The film starts when he comes back to the spot in the winter trying to convince himself that the girl wasn't hit after all. So the whole is a memory backspin, all in black and white, underlaid by the anxious heartbeat of a Toccata of Bach played by Glenn Gould.

One is out of breath through the whole movie though a little confused at some points. He is still cutting.

Professional camera men and assistants were helping along with friends and family members who were in charge of the sound, the lighting, regulated the traffic and made sandwiches.

He will be trying to use this film as an entry to a film academy.

Jonas is rounding up his studies of math at the university of Munich. He put some juice into this paper and pencil existence by frequent appearances at Öme's in Lindau laying his hand on apple trees, the library to reduce the overboarding tide of books or viewing with Öme her years' layers of correspondence.

In the late summer he bicycled in the backhills of Hungary and Slovakia to where the Capitalist World has'nt stretched its lusty fingers yet). The landscape must have been lovely and the people not keen on these foreign apparitions.

In October he went to London to sort out if it held some future opportunities for him. The training places he sniffed at didn't attract him especially (architecture or bank, but the city and the life there he liked greatly. So who knows, what tickles his nose a little later.

His present plan is to go to Namibia in January to be a Math and German teacher in a black girls' school that was founded and is run by a retired German industrialist.

Chrisi David is still doing his doctorate in physics in a Max Planck Institute close to Stuttgart. The institute is very well equipped but the question he is supposed to answer is a prize question all over the world. Right now another PhD student and a postdoc have been put to work in a Dutch lab to solve the same problem.

So it's an exiting race but also nervewracking because he has chewed on the problem already for one and a half years. He tries to keep his mind fresh by all kinds of sports, the institute offers a psychogram of a lot of prodiges bustling in the thin air of hightech experimental physics where most things that go easily are done already and the only backexit goes to the industry where there is a long waiting line already too.

Chrisi stills lives in a nice quiet coexistence with a cultivated aunt of mine. He explains her computer to her and she cooks him a Sunday meal once in a while.

I, myself plough my way through the wishes and assaults of Thimo. It's daily Sauna' hot and cold with lots of backwhipping to get temperature. But it's also a relish, because all information and experience you convey lands instantly with him to

stay there. Thimo is a treasure for any teacher (also his beloved gradeschool teacher).

My drawing Thursday still exists and has become a real session: After 10 years we have switched to the colloquial adress "Du", quite a step for oldfashioned Germans. We discuss anything on our mind with great passion and our model participates vigorously. (She is a engrained feminist).

In our "Citizens' Initiative" we still try to chanel some traffic away from Reichenberg and get more safety for children and old people by side- and crosswalks. We also try to preserve some of the original character of the village trying to prevent the village council from creating more and more builing zones. Getting signatures transports us into everybody's kitchens which is fun and interesting.

Our little home caroussel is still touring: the two big boys, Bumbi and Jürgen are having their young grown up existence which means long weekend nights and late sleep-in mornings but it also means that they bring their friends and provide constant entertainment for us and Thimo. Jürgen will stay with us til his last exam is finished and then move to some new adventure in a big city doing the civil service.

Martin had an eventful year: a rewarding Drosophila summer course in a grand Bavarian ranch. It was a mixed German American undertaking with a Japanese professor from Caltech. The second part will take place next year in America.

In October Martin (and I) visited a Drosophila branch in Peking which is on an international level of quality. The head professor had been in Würzburg for some months. Martin gave lectures there and also in the old city of Xian in a high tech Neurology lab in a military academy which was started by a very energetic professor started who spent some time in the Salk Institute. Very dedicated students appeared in their run down military clothes and from outside came the shouting and brass drill through the window.

On the whole one felt very little of the old system. Striking was the impetus and boom of the economy and the feeling of growing freedom and opportunities among the people. This optimism was infecting, on us too.

A similar feeling came across in India where we spent another week. The occasion was an anniversary of the Tata Institute of Bombay which has a branch in Biology in the city of Bangalore. Bangalore has grown from a city of 2 Mill. to 6 Mill. in 4 years. It is now the softwear and high tech center of India. But it is by no means an ugly city: It has an old colonial center with golf course, fancy old hotels a palacelike postoffice and a maharaja palace and park that covers the space of a

city in itself. There are hardly any highrise buildings. It's like many little provincial towns sewn together.

What amazed us is the amount of education and sophistication assembled there and in spite of their orientation to the world market the importance that the religion still holds, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian (Catholic and ancient Syrian) also among many academics.

In Martin's lab there is a constant turnover of foreign young scientists who add some colour also to our existence.

The genetic decoding of the *Drosophila* brain is going on, whereby the interpretation of the results in the context of brains in general is the real battlefield. *Drosophila* has become one of the experimental animals because they are a puzzle where you can decipher more of the "landscape" than in almost all other organisms.

Now I have worn out your patience already to the point of exhaustion. But the most important person is still coming:

Óme. She is still in Lindau. She celebrated her 80th birthday with the whole big family on a long weekend in May with a big old-fashioned tent on the grass next to the house. She still shapes the program of the Peace Institute in Lindau and cheers up and feeds relatives and friends who look for a hideaway or just drop in. She can't walk well anymore, but still drives and her head is full of surprises as it always has been, flashier than our slow ones.

This is the end of this endless saga. I hope, you have a joyous and reposeful Christmas and a new year that you can start with appetite and spirit.

With much love from us all