

A MAGICAL CHRISTMAS

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Age 76

To set the scene: The year was 1967 and I am celebrating my first Christmas away from my family and friends. My husband and I are living in a tiny village in Germany, called Burgoberbach, located in the beautiful state of Bavaria. We both work in the city of Ansbach, a city that was created in the 8th Century. It was not badly damaged by the wars and hence it retains its original historical baroque sheen. My husband is a United States military medic and is stationed there and I have followed him and found a job working for the United States Armed Forces Institute on a secret project. This intrigued my friends back home who could only imagine me working for the CIA. I had a lot of fun with that one..

It was our choice to live off base so that we might better understand how the Germans live. Our one bedroom apartment is on the second floor and has a bath, kitchen and small living room. We also have a balcony that overlooks a soccer field and a forest. The living room, hall and bath are heated with oil that we bring up from the basement and pour into a container on the side of the stove and hot water heater. The oil drips into another container. The next step is to drop a lighted match into the area where the oil drips and say a prayer that there is not too much oil in that container. I am so glad that we have chosen to live here because that is where our Magical Christmas began; I hope you will close your eyes and imagine our Magical Christmas.

First on our agenda was a visit to Nuremberg for the world famous Christkindlesmarkt that begins the Friday before the first Sunday in Advent. My eyes were all aglow as we entered the market. It was beginning to look and smell more like

Christmas with the enticing smells of mulled wine and rum punch, toasted almonds, Nuremburg bratwurst, gingerbread, and other items that were special to Bavaria. The craftsmanship of the of the ornaments and other items were like no other. I came away with so much Christmas spirit and a Rosenthal plate of Winter in Regensburg. It is the inspiration for reliving my Magical Christmas; As I look at the beautiful icy water flowing slowly under a bridge, trees filled with glistening snow, and in the background a magnificent old church with snow on the roof and two tall steeples. The plate brings back the wide eyed wonder of my childhood dreams of what Christmas should be like.

Next on my list was a Christmas tree...not just any tree but the perfect tree. I asked my landlord where I should go to purchase this tree. He said the best trees were in an ax. When my husband came home we put on several layers of clothing and headed into the forest. As we entered a light snow was falling. Our feet shuffled through the snow as we set off to search for our perfect tree. I lifted my face and inhaled the scent of fresh pine trees swaying softly in the breeze. A shadow of light cascaded down between the trees thus enhancing the snow topped branches. Almost instantly we found the perfect Christmas tree. My husband cut it down and off we went pulling the tree behind us. It was a lot of work and I was tired so I set off to find our little VW that by now was covered in snow. I dug out our 1955 VW convertible and went back to find the tree. Our VW pulled it the rest of the way. We struggled to get it up the stairs to our second floor apartment. We were so tired but so proud of our perfect Christmas tree.

Step two: Decorate our tree! I could hardly wait to decorate our perfect tree. Since I had only two ornaments I had to be creative so I had stopped at the village a few before to get the perfect decorations for our perfect tree. For several evenings we had

been stringing popcorn and cranberries to put on our beautiful perfect tree. Lights! I had not seen any in the stores and I wanted to use what my neighbors would use so back to my landlord for advise. His reply was that he had extra "holders" he would share with me and off he went to the basement. What were holders I wondered. Did he not understand what I had said? Was it something to hold the strings in place on the tree? I wondered what color or colors they may be. He returned with a small box. How, I wondered, did he get stings of lights in that small box? The answer to my question was that they were clip on candle holders. I asked, Do you really think I should use real candles on my real tree? Yes, he said, because the tree is fresh and would be disposed of before the leaves turned dry. Everyone in the village uses real candles so after work the next day I stopped at the village store for real candles for my real tree. That night we put holders and candles on our real tree. We found a long match and began to light the candles. I stepped back from the tree to see the effect. THIS WAS BEYOND MAGICAL. Never will I have a tree this beautiful. I loved the simplicity. It was like a movie. All I needed was Jimmy Stewart. Christmas can not get any better than this I said to myself...but wait...there is more to come.

Christmas Eve we were told to dress warm so we wore layers of clothes and floppy wool hats and mittens. We each had a large candle as we waited with our landlord and his family, Snow was falling and the moon was shining brightly when suddenly in the distance we heard singing. There was a caravan approaching singing Silent Night. Soon we would join the caravan. I wonder if it was snowing the night HE was born? I felt like this was truly a holy night as we walked toward the little church in our village. We stopped at the cemetery to place candles on the graves of loved ones.

Finally we came to the church that I passed everyday on my way to work or travel. We entered silently and the women went to one side and the men to the other. It was a beautiful little church. There were no fancy pews. We sat on wooden benches without backs. There was no electric lights so our candles lit up the church. There was no heat and it was so cold but my heart and soul were warmed by the spirit of the evening. It was a Catholic service and we were Methodists but that didn't seem to matter that evening. I felt in my heart what I think the priest was telling us. Tears were slowly filling my eyes and freezing on my cheeks as we left the church. I thought of my great Grandma for whom I am named and my Grandfather that I last saw on Christmas day five years ago. This continued to be a magical Christmas. We arrived home to see our beautiful perfect real tree with its perfect real decorations and once again my heart was warmed and it needed to be because the oil had gone out of our stove and the house was cold. and it was freezing that night as the snow fell. Hopefully our living room and kitchen would be warm by morning. It was a sin to heat a bedroom. I never learned why.

Christmas morning we opened our presents, under our perfect real tree and went to our landlord 's apartment for kochen that consisted of mouth watering, delicious pastries and other finger food and coffee that we provided as coffee was considered special in German homes at that time. Then we went to a friend's house that had a phone. My parents called that afternoon at a scheduled time as we did not have a phone or the money to call them. It was our first phone call in six months. We told them out our Magical Christmas with our real tree with real candles and real decorations. We ended the call with goodbye and love you.

Thank you for letting me share my Magical Christmas with you.

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