

[This was a talk given by Anne Kaness at the 1984 Christmas Banquet, First Assembly of God, Ventura, CA. Typed from the original handwritten text by Jim Kaness in 2017]

## CHRISTMAS IN GERMANY!

(Pat gave me 3 minutes, but I won't promise!) Taking you back to my childhood and growing up years I will try to touch on some of the Christmas customs in "the Old Country".

Winter was long, gray & cold, but the Christmas season made it the most beautiful season of the year.

It started with Advent time spent in physical and spiritual preparation. There was needlework, baking, keeping of secrets and singing of songs by a candlelit Advent wreath, longing for the celebration of Christ's Birth.

St. Nicklas Day was celebrated the 6<sup>th</sup> of December, more or less eagerly looked forward to by us children. St. Nicklas came in person dressed as the bishop he really was, and he brought a helper.

Presents and goodies were given to the children reported good by their parents, and for those classified as bad there was rear persuasion to do better in the coming year, doled out by St. Nicklas' helper.

I remember a few years in my childhood where my anticipation of this day wasn't too enthusiastic – with good reason!

Finally it arrived – Christmas Eve – with two official holidays to follow, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Christmas Days.

There are memories for me of a tree with real candles, a beautiful Crêche Scene underneath it, a table laden with presents covered by a huge bedsheet for suspense and all this left by the Christchild visiting from home to home! The angels were the helpers.

My sisters and myself recited long poems by the tree, memorized weeks before, and sang Christmas Carols in harmony accompanied by my dad on guitar, violin or accordion.

I was surrounded by candlelight, music, presents and a loving family. (Felt good!)

Toys were the kind that presented a challenge: A doll kitchen – a grocery store (freshly

stocked) – windup toys and wooden things to pull & push or assemble.

My favorite presents were new books to read, full of wonders and stories I didn't know, things to dream about.

Later on in the evening we prepared to go to Midnight Mass.

I loved the beautiful churchbells all ringing together over the countryside at 11:45 to announce the Birth of Christ and the beginning of the festive Midnight Mass. It lasted for three hours filled with candlelight, a life-sized manger, the joyful Christmas Story and majestic pipe organ music by the great masters.

There is nothing that can send your mind and spirit soaring toward heaven more than a beautiful Christmas Cantata or a Largo by Handel played in a high ceilinged Cathedral on a huge pipe organ!

After Mass we hurried home to a warm fire and a long drawnout breakfast with family and friends.

This was Christmas of peacetime - there were also the war years! Advent time was spent knitting warm socks, gloves, shawls and hats for our soldiers on the Russian Front. Mother rolled bandages for the Red Cross. No bells were allowed to ring and the organist was away at war.

Blackout curtains darkened the night and instead of Midnight Mass there was the wailing of Air-Raid-Sirens and long hours spent in underground shelters, mostly wine cellars in my hometown.

Few men could be with their families and few would return!

I was so sad for my friends whose fathers were off to war and considered myself the luckiest kid around to have my dad home at Christmas! He had suffered from recurring ulcers and was not accepted for Military Service. How I thanked God for that!

I wondered if peace would ever return to Earth like the angel had promised!

Well – Return it did in 1945, and with it came a new arrival! Care Packages from Uncle Joe in America. We couldn't wait to open these miracles from a rich land far away, but had to be patient until Christmas Eve!

There were cans of corn we weren't familiar with, peanut butter that tasted great but stuck to your tongue, eggs & ham in little green cans called C-rations (my favorite),

warm coats, clothes and a Kewpie Doll for me. I named her appropriately: Dolly. Dolly looked so cheerful and unworried and I often wondered about that place she came from. She lifted my war-troubled spirits every time I looked at her!

Back also were my beloved Bells at Midnight, candle-glow in windows, Midnight Mass and the hope of Peace on Earth brought by a savior born as a baby! Candles on X-Mass trees are “verboten” now – as for my Kewpie Doll: I finally came to live in and love the country she promised me with a wink in her eyes.

My family, the bells and pipe organ music in cathedrals are far away and I do miss them, especially at this time of year. The Joy of Christmas, however, is within all of us - Christ the Savior.

Von ganzen Herzen wüńsche ich Ihnen eine Gesegnete Weihnacht!

From my heart to all of you – A Blessed Christmas!