

Hallo von Deutschland



Friday 15 Dec. 2006

We arose about 7:00am, had coffee and checked our email. Around 10:00 we started final preparations for our trip. We took inventory once more before closing up the suitcases. Somewhere I lost my neck scarf. But, while looking for it, I found my battery operated socks that I had been looking for. Oh, well. I'm already packed. Kathy gave me a haircut. When I heard her say "Oh, oh", I knew something was amiss. She had taken a big chunk out of the side of my head. She was devastated, I thought it was funny. We left for Kansas City around 1:30. Called Pam at work and got the combination to her garage door so we could get into the house. We went to a place called Shorthorns for supper. Kristi met us there for a little bon voyage party. We got to bed around 10:00.

Saturday/Sunday 16/17 December

I woke up at 1:00am. Couldn't go back to sleep so I just stayed up. Pam & Donnie drove us to the airport. We got there around 7:30. Our flight was scheduled for 11:00am but we knew checking in, especially for an international flight, might take some time. As it turned out it only took a few minutes. However, the airlines had cancelled our flight and put us on one that departed at 1:00pm. So, there we sat.

We checked our luggage but carried on my computer and one bag. It took about 15 minutes to get through security. Had to empty all our pockets, take off our shoes and remove the computer from the case. Kathy's purse did not make it through the x-ray process. She had something loose in it that needed to be placed in a "baggie". No big deal but we got a little anxious when the purse didn't come through.

The plane was an MD-88. It holds 140 passengers, 5 wide. It has a speed of 500mph and a range of 1700 miles. The flight to Atlanta was about 2 hours. When we landed we had to catch a train and ride it to the end of the line. We got on at station A. Had to go to E. Standing only and every time it started and stopped it almost jerked you off your feet. From there we had to walk all the way to the last gate, #36. Since we were two hours behind, we didn't have a lot of time to fool around. We checked in and I asked about a smoking area. The attendant told us there was one back around gate 16, about a 10 minute walk. So, back we went. The room was about the size of our living room, crammed with people and the smoke so thick you couldn't see. Apparently this was the only area in the whole terminal where you could smoke. We sucked down a couple of cigarettes and hurried back to our gate only to discover that our flight was going to be delayed. I guess they had to do some work on the carpet or something like that.

We finally got onto the plane after a 30 minute delay. This was a 767. It holds 204 passengers, 7 wide, with two aisles. This plane flies at around 540mph and has a range of 6500 miles. The plane was completely full and the flight was an 8 ½ hour nightmare. We located our seats right on the wing so we had limited visibility outside. That wasn't really too bad because there wasn't much to see anyway. We were given a small pillow and a blanket, which was nice. Right next to us were two toilets. Handy, but not conducive to any rest. We were given earphones so we could listen to the radio or watch the movie. I'm thinking they came from a Cracker Jacks box. Two little plugs with ear attachments.

Also seated next to us was a young mother and a baby.

First of all, the earphones kept cutting out so we gave up trying to watch the movie. The overhead light above my seat wouldn't stay on, so I couldn't read. Between the baby crying and the toilet flushing, sleep was out of the question. Of course, every time someone unlatched the toilet door it sounded like inserting a round into a bolt-action rifle. There was no leg room so I had to get up and down several times just to stretch. The seat reclined about 3 degrees. Put the pillow behind your head and you're back upright again, so when I did nod off a couple of times, my head fell forward and woke me up. I finally put the pillow behind my back. That helped a little. We were also given eye shades and ear plugs but we didn't bother. The service was fine and the food adequate. One of the attendants slipped us an extra couple of bottles of scotch. The ones we bought were \$5.00 each.

When we arrived in Zurich it was cold and raining so I didn't get any photos except above the clouds. We found a smoking lounge within a few yards of the gangway. Europe is a little more considerate of us sinners. Again, we had to ride a train to where we would pick up our luggage. It was crowded and I almost got squeezed in the door when it shut. There were sounds of sheep bleating and cow bells ringing from a speaker system on the train. Welcome to Switzerland.

We got through customs with only a mild reprimand. It seems we got in a Swiss only line but he let us on through after a quick look at the passports. I know Uschi & Horst thought we had missed the flight because we tarried a few minutes having a cigarette. All of the luggage came through fine, except one of my bags was the last one off. It's possible that it had been around a couple of times and I just didn't recognize it. Anyway, that added to the delay.

We got the luggage loaded into the van and went to a coffee shop attached to the terminal, but the entrance was from the parking lot. The ride to Villingen was less than an hour but we had to pass through border inspection several times. The road crossed into Germany, then back to Switzerland, then back into Germany. There was no problem or delay but interesting. I didn't see them, but Horst said there were tanks nearby. Switzerland will soon be joining the European union and the checkpoints will disappear. I think their biggest concern is money laundering, more than subversives. Everyone drives very fast here, even on the curvy roads. At one point I noticed we were going about 160 kph, which by my calculation is around 100mph.

Uschi's house is built on a hill. In the US we'd call this area Snob Hill. It's 5 levels, stucco, with a flat roof. Most of the newer homes here all seem to have flat roofs. Horst is an architect and built several of the homes in this part of town. He told me his was the second house on this hill and I saw photos of it with sheep still grazing all around it. You can see the entire town from their terrace just outside the living room.

When we arrived, I was introduced to Omi, German for grandmother, who lives with Uschi. She is 91. She has her own apartment there. She gets around with the aid of a walker and only recently has had to have help bathing and dressing. She was a school teacher and speaks English very well. Unfortunately she suffers from CRS. One minute she knows us and the next she thinks Kathy is a niece or an aunt or some other relative. Uschi's daughter, Stephani and her family showed up around 1:00 for brunch. She and her husband both speak English, so that helped me. Uschi tries and Horst can when he remembers. After the meal I excused myself and went for a nap. I had now been up for

over 30 hours and with the 7 hour time difference, I was exhausted. At 4:00 we had tea and cake. Had a good supper around 8:30 then watched a video of Stephi's wedding. I hope I can get a copy of it. It went from very formal to very wild.

This was a combination Catholic/Protestant wedding held in the Cathedral in downtown Villingen. It has been said that no one will ever top this wedding and I must agree. Very elegant. Beautiful old church. The soloist was an opera singer.

Surrounding the church is a commons area where there was a Renaissance Festival going on. The bride and groom were escorted by the Town Crier and the Court Jester along with musicians and drummers to the blacksmith. He made a bracelet to fit around their two hands to complete the union of the couple. From there they made a short drive to a restaurant where they were greeted by members of the Briard Club and their dogs and a Riding Club. Stephi owns a hunter/jumper which was among the group. There was dining and dancing until the bride was kidnapped and the party had to move to the new location where she was taken. All kinds of entertainment. Silly games. A hand-puppet show. I didn't understand a word, but I laughed until my stomach hurt.

Finally got to bed around 1:00am. I was surprised to find two single beds, pushed together to appear as one, but with two mattresses separated by the sideboards and separate comforters. I gather the idea is that one will not disturb the other. Not too good for snuggling, however. I discovered that this is common around here.

Monday 18 December

I woke up with a leg and back ache from the plane ride. After I got a couple of cups of coffee down me, Uschi insisted that I lie on the floor while she played chiropractor. Then, to my amazement, she stuck me with acupuncture needles. It did seem to help. We had breakfast of egg in a little egg cup, toast and bread with jam and cheese, orange drink and coffee. This was typical of every morning about 10:00.

Uschi had remodeled the bathroom for us. However, there was no hot water. They contacted Stephani's husband, Patrick. I guess he knows about that stuff. Anyway, he put in a new thermostat and now we can take a shower.

Uschi took Kathy and me down to the village for the afternoon. It is surrounded by a stone wall about 10 feet high and a tower on all four sides. Each tower has a different colored clock. I guess that's so if you get disoriented you can tell which direction to go. There are lots of shops with residences above them. The streets are very narrow and only a few are wide enough for an automobile so we parked outside and walked in. Attached to each tower was a monastery. Villingen was a Catholic settlement. Strangely each monastery was a different order. To give you an idea of how old this place is, I noted on one of the towers that it was built in 1260. The buildings are very colorful; modern on the inside, but original on the outside. People everywhere. Uschi has three Briards and one went with us. We took the dog into the stores, the pharmacy, the coffee house, the bank, everywhere. Imagine that in the USA. The streets are all brick and cobblestone, the buildings stucco, inside and out, with tiled roofs. The walls are 8 to 10 inches thick in every house and building I've entered. We had coffee and wandered back to the car. There are few parking meters. Rather a vending machine every 50 yards or so where you buy a ticket and place it in the vehicle where it can be seen.

There are large Christmas trees on every corner. They are cut from the forest and placed in a small hole in the sidewalk and supported by driving wooden wedges around the base. At 4:00 we went to Moni and Rudolf's for tea and cake. Uschi took Kathy and I and Omi to their home and left us for a few hours. She had to go back home to get supper ready for some guests; an Orthopedist and his wife who is a GP. We had wine and then ate about 9:00. After supper I was able to get my computer hooked up and transferred my photos to my computer at home.

Sometime during the day we went to the grocery store. Checking out, I noticed there was no one to sack the purchases. I guess that makes sense, because there were no sacks. The checkers sat at the register. You put your items on the counter where they were scanned then you placed them back into your basket and took them to the car. If you need a sack or a box you must provide it yourself. I did notice that many of the items were less expensive, even accounting for the Euro/Dollar exchange rate of 1.3.

We watched an old western movie. Interesting because it was all in German.

Finally got to bed at 1:00am

Tuesday 19 December

I am convinced there are only about three towns in Germany. Everything else is a suburb. You can't go more than 5 miles without another village or settlement. A perfect example is Schwennigen. The story, as was told to me, is that during the 30-year war 1618-1648, following the Protestant Reformation in the 1500's, a group of Protestants attacked Villingen but were repulsed because the city was well protected by the wall. So, they built their own village about 3 miles away. The people of Villingen then attacked and burned Schwennigen. Eventually a toll house was built between them and they were charged to enter Villingen. They say when an Eagle flies over Villingen his wingspan is 10 meters. But only 1/2 that when he flies over Schwennigen because one wing is covering his eyes so he doesn't have to see people below. Strangely, these two towns, each with a population about the same as Emporia, are in different counties but are ruled by a common local government.

Today we visited there. Unfortunately the Christmas Market had closed up the previous week. We went into a mall (with one of the dogs, of course). Bought some sausages from a meat market and had coffee.

Very close to Uschi's house is a cemetery with a tower, The Germans love their towers! You can see this one from their house. We stopped so I could get some photos. Because land is at a premium, there are no burials there anymore. You get cremated and placed in a container on a wall. A sign said the chapel and tower was built in 1100.

It's 4:00. Time for tea and cake, then supper at 9:00.

Some observations:

Streets and roads are very narrow. Lots of intersections. Very few stop signs. I assume that would only add to the congestion. Everyone seems to drive stick shift autos and because of the winding roads they are constantly shifting gears. VW's are predominant as you might imagine. Lots of Toyota, Mercedes, BMW, Ford.

I noticed that there are many products that I recognized, and strangely lots of signs like Hotel, Restaurant, Bank, and, of course, Coca Cola and McDonalds. I hear American songs on the radio.

No one drinks the tap water, only bottled water. Most of them slightly flavored or sparkling waters. I'm not much of a beer drinker, but the brand Horst & Uschi buys is really pretty good, even though it is more of an amber. The ladies seem to like to mix it slightly with one of the bottled waters. It comes in ½ liter bottles, or about a pint.

Many items seem to be less expensive and the tax is included on the price tag. Gas and cigarettes, however, are more expensive. I've seen regular gas at 1.27 to 1.57 per liter, which runs it into the \$5 to \$7 range per gallon. Electricity is also very expensive. Horst unplugs everything...the computer, the power adapter, the Ethernet switch. He even turns off the DSL modem. I'm not sure if that's to conserve energy or he's afraid of lightning. Actually, I think he's a little anal!!!

Housing is very expensive so many own flats or town-houses because of the cost of building lots and construction. Houses are generally pretty large and very close together. There are no closets. You have to have wardrobes or armoires. Drinks are not iced. Kathy and I have to keep a small pan of water in the freezer and break it up with a hammer to have ice for our drinks.

The outside doors are interesting. They all lock only with a key. The outside has a handle, but it's for pulling only. It doesn't rotate to turn the latch. You must use a key to enter. That being the case, I wonder why they bother to lock it, since no one can get in anyway. I would be concerned about a fire. If the house was burning and you couldn't find the key to open the door you'd be in deep do-do.

I notice lots of glass in the houses. Large windows, but they are triple-paned and the walls very thick. The south wall of the living room here is all glass, giving a gorgeous view. The house is heated with radiators, but there is forced air heating from the floor at the sliding glass door entrance and apparently heat above the 4-car garage, the roof of which serves as the back lawn. It's Christmas with freezing temperatures and the grass there is still green. At the side of the house, between the walls and the sidewalk going up the hill, is just miniature forest so there is very little to mow.

Wednesday 20 December

I woke up about 4:00am, 9:00pm Tuesday in Emporia. Decided to check my email. Went back to bed and got up about 9:30. Breakfast shortly thereafter. Then another acupuncture treatment on my back. At noon we took a drive through the Black Forest. Breathtaking scenery. You can see small meadows among the trees and farm houses dotting the landscape. We drove through many little settlements, mostly farmhouses. They are huge houses, but the barn is on the bottom and the hay mow on the top. The people live in the middle. In the winter, snow may get so deep they can't leave the house for weeks. This way they can tend the livestock below, which also help provide heat and the hay above acts as an insulator. People actually ski right over the houses. There may be several farm houses right in a row alongside the road, but the fields they tend are elsewhere. We drove by a logging mill. As you might guess, logging is big business in this area.

We wound up in Freiburg, a big university town. Freiburg and Villingen were founded at about the same time by the same group of people. Uschi's vehicle is a Ford mini-van with

a camper top. It's too tall to get into a parking garage, so we had to drive around until we found a spot in a Deutsch Bank lot. Between the parking attendant and a policeman, we were allowed to park there as long as we were doing business at the bank. So I took this opportunity to trade some US dollars for Euros. For \$200 I receive \$141 and change. They charged 4,50 for the exchange since we didn't have an account there. Anyway, we walked across the street and the Christmas Market was still going on there. This is like a flea market with gifts, ornaments, toys and food vendors. It was held in the commons area around another Cathedral with a huge tower. We went into the Cathedral, but opted not to climb the tower. This Cathedral took about 400 years to build, being completed in the early 1500's. Elbow to elbow people at the market. About 3:30 we bought a sausage from a vendor. Two small sausages a little larger than your thumb and a foot long in a small roll. Very good. It was getting late, so we headed home using a faster route on a good highway. At the market I couldn't find a place to pee, so we stopped along the road and I went over the bank. I even took a picture of the stream. Not my stream... the stream flowing down from the mountains.

Got home around 5:30, Had to have tea & cake at 6:30. Then supper at 8:30.

We watched House and Monk. Didn't understand a word but everybody else laughed.

I sent some photos to the girls and birthday wishes to Debbie and went to bed.

Thursday 21 December

Slept late. Almost missed breakfast at 10:30. (Damn!) Moni picked up Kathy and I at 12:30. We went to her house for coffee and fruit. Rudolf came home about 1:30 and we ate lunch. Rudolf is a school administrator and it's still in session until Friday so he had to go back to work. Moni took the afternoon off to be with us. She designs kitchens. When you purchase a home here, you have to put in your own kitchen. Not just appliances, but cabinets and sink, etc.

After lunch we drove to the house where they lived as children so I could get a couple of pictures. Then we went to the outskirts of town to see where the girls played in the summer and skied in the winter. It was a large lea at the edge of the forest. They forced me to walk up that damn mountain, into the woods. The girls kept complaining that I needed to walk faster so as to keep warm. It was all I could do to get up the hill, let alone walk faster. Fortunately along the way we met a young couple with a couple of dogs coming down. Moni had her dog, Charlie, a Dalmation, so it gave me a chance to rest while they visited. As soon as they heard Kathy say something to me, they immediately began speaking in English. We finally got to the top and then about 100 yards through the trees was a clearing where you could see another village and in the distance, the Swiss Alps.

We walked a little further and suddenly there was this huge mound called Magdalenberg. It was a burial mound, dating to 616 BC. It was originally constructed for a Celtic Prince. Like the tombs of Egypt, it too, was robbed in the late 1800's. Later, archeologists discovered other chambers containing artifacts that the robbers didn't find, some of which now reside in a museum. They eventually discovered that 127 persons had been buried there, so it actually became the cemetery for the settlers. It encompasses

33,000 cubic meters. I took a photo but it was so close to the trail I wasn't able to do justice to its size in the picture without walking out into some farmers mustard field. That's right. Mustard. They grow it not to eat, but to use for fertilizer.

A short distance from there was a big oak tree. Now to us, that's no big deal. To these people it was. It was encircled with a heavy fence to keep you from damaging it. I'm guessing the trunk to be about 12 feet around, typical for an American Oak. The big deal is 1st, it was 275 years old. 2nd, look around. This is the Black Forest. Evergreens. How did an oak tree get here?

We finally got back down the mountain and drove back into town to a park. There we saw a swimming pool where the girls used to go. Within this park was supposedly the best restaurant in town, a convention lodge and a mineral spa where people would go to soak for healing purposes. More hills !!!

I now know why there are no fat people in Germany in spite of the fact that they eat all the time. The roads are so congested it's difficult to drive so they walk everywhere. But, it's always up-hill. And when you get there you have to climb 3 flights of stairs.

But, Kathy and Moni had a great time reminiscing about their childhood. They hadn't seen each other for over 20 years. Kathy was back here in 1993, but Moni and Rudolf were in Equador at that time where he was an Ambassador.

So, back to the house for tea and cake at 4:00. At 5:30 Rudolf returned home and we had wine. At 7:30 we ate supper. About 9:00 Moni took Kathy & I back to Uschi's. I fixed myself a scotch and downloaded the photos from my camera. At 10:00 we killed another two bottles of wine. I think I mentioned in one of my emails that we were probably going to get really fat and really drunk while we were here.

Finally got to bed about 12:30. After that climbing and walking I think I'm going to need more than acupuncture tomorrow!!!

Friday 22 December

Today was a day of rest. Thank you, God. I wore myself out doing nothing.

Niki came for breakfast. She is Uschi's oldest daughter. She was born with a toxic blood problem and it effected her nervous system. She's very bright, but has a spastic condition. Even so, she is married with two children ages 11 & 13. She has a housekeeper that assists her with the home. I haven't met her husband or children yet. I think he's some kind of a tax collector, or assessor.

I spend most of the day catching up on this journal.

3:30 tea & cake. Had it early because Niki had to get back home. Kathy & Uschi took her back so Kathy could see her home. I opted to stay here. They then went to the hospital to visit a friend of Uschi's.

Supper about 8:30. I went to bed about 9:30. Woke up at 1:00 and checked my email, then slept until about 9:00am. I asked about the plan for Saturday. The response was, "Get ready for Christmas Eve". I'm not sure what that entails, but my plan is to try to stay out of the way.

Saturday 23 December

Ate breakfast about 10:30, as usual. Then I made chili. I made it in a rice cooker. Apparently there is no such thing here as slow cooker or crock pot. Kathy and Uschi spent a few hours wrapping presents, which I guess is what they meant by getting ready for Christmas Eve. As it was explained to me, Christmas Eve is for immediate family only. Everyone gets together, then, on Christmas Day. So, as promised, I stayed out of the way except for playing chef in the kitchen for a few minutes. Most of the day I played on the computer and read on the book I brought that I wasn't able to read on the plane. Omi had a spell during the afternoon. She passed out. Apparently she had a mini-stroke, or a seizure, but she was able to make tea and cake at 4:00. We went to deliver presents. Only immediate family will be in attendance when they are opened on Christmas morning. Kathy says that's so if they don't like it, the person who gave it to them won't be embarrassed !!! I think she's jerking my chain. The last stop was at Stephani's where we had cappuccino and cake at 6:00. We stopped at the E Center to buy last minute supplies....beer, wine, bottled water, scotch, etc. The stores will all be closed for the next few days. The E Center is a giant supermarket. This one is about the size of our Walmart, except it's all groceries. One section is about 2/3 the size of Walmart's grocery. It's only beer, wine, soft drinks and mixes. I saw only bottles...no cans or plastic containers. The bottles are held in plastic crates that hold various amounts from 10 to 24 bottles, depending on what you are buying. The bottles are returned to a recycling machine which then gives you a coupon for credit on your next purchase. The chili was a hit. I noticed everyone had at least two servings. Apparently Kathy had mentioned to Steffi's husband, Patrick, that I was making chili, so he wanted to make sure we saved some for him. Kathy and Uschi just left to deliver it !!! Looks like I may have to make some more before I leave. The sun was out for a few hours today. Then it got really overcast and cold. I was sure it was going to snow, but so far, not. 32 degrees F here, with no sun, it's like 0 degrees F at home, except there is no wind. That's interesting because the hills around here are full of electrical generating windmills, just like the ones we see at home. I'm not sure what's in store for tomorrow, but I was told we will go downtown to the old village at midnight for something special. Can't wait. Wine at 10:30. Off to bed

Sunday 24 December

Woke up around 7:30. I finally figured out how to use the microwave so fixed myself a cup of coffee. Breakfast as usual around 10:30. At 11:30 we started putting up the Christmas tree. Finally finished about 3:00. We had to wait for instructions from Uschi and she was busy cooking in the kitchen. Plus, all new ornaments which meant unpacking and attaching wire to each so it would hang on the tree. I found it interesting that we are here amidst a zillion evergreens, but we erected an artificial tree!! Didn't see Horst much today. I'm not sure what he was doing but he wasn't involved in the process. It's very cold and gloomy. I've been here a week now and I've seen the sun twice. Once was when we went to Freiburg. Uschi opened a bottle of eggnog. Very thick. 20% alcohol. Very good. Just a couple of shots. Last night Kathy bought a small bottle of

Jaegermeister. That is 33%. We had a shot after supper. Thought it might help settle the stomach after the chili.

I mentioned they don't use much ice. The neighbor has an American refrigerator with an ice maker, so we got a pitcher full the 2nd night. For a few days, we filled a small dish with water, put it in the freezer, and broke it up with a hammer. Then someone discovered these little bags. They come in a box like sandwich bags. You just peel them off the roll, run water into the bag which flows into 20 little compartments forming ice cubes. Rather they are shaped like a lollipop. Not too handy, but better than nothing.

It's 4:00 pm. Must be time for tea and cake!!!

It was very cold today, both outside and in. The temperature outside was only around 30 F but bone chilling. I think it was about the same inside the house. The only place I could find that was half-way warm was in the bedroom so Kathy and I both went to take a nap. It's Christmas Eve so we dressed for dinner. Horst read the Christmas story from the Bible as we were seated around the table. We had ham hock and potato salad with bach beer. After we ate, we turned on the Christmas Tree and sang Silent Night, along with Harry Belafonte, before we opened our presents. Then, naturally, we had wine and cake. The original plan was to go to the village at midnight to an outdoor concert but it was cold and we figured we'd have to walk about 20 minutes and then probably couldn't see anything anyway, so we passed. Also we had been drinking a little. These folks don't mind you driving 120mph, but don't drink and drive. They are VERY strict about that. Tomorrow will be a big day. Most of the family will be here and we will also go to Moni's for a few hours to see some of her family. I hope to get a lot of photos.

I stepped out onto the terrace about 11:00pm. The sky had cleared and you could finally see the stars. The church bells were ringing, as they had been most of the day and you could see the lights of the village below. Went to bed about midnight.

Monday 25 December, Christmas Day

The sun was out when we got up but by early afternoon it was overcast again. Had breakfast at 10:30. The family arrived around 1:00. Steffi & Patrick and their two children, and Niki and her daughter. Niki's husband and son were not there. Had a big meal of venison, potato dumplings, brussell sprouts, red cabbage, beer and wine, and a pudding like dessert.

Patrick said he was pretty sure he could make me a DVD of the wedding. I certainly hope so. We sat around the table and visited for an hour. They wanted to see pictures of our home and children, so I got on the computer and managed to find most of them.

At 4:00 Kathy & I went to Moni & Rudolf's. One of Moni's daughters was there with her three children. Not sure how old they are, but late teens, early 20's. The daughter, Sybille, has a live-in (for 10 years I think I heard them say). He's a border patrol guard at one of the check-points we drove through when we first arrived. He's one of those people that you know instantly you're going to like.

Since it was tea time, naturally we had to have tea with warm apple strudel and ice cream. Then wine. About 7:00 we had to eat again. God help me!!! Then more wine and schnapps. The young ones left around 5:30. They had a party to attend. The rest of us sat around the table and visited about the family until about 9:00 when Sybille and her partner left. We finally got back to Uschi's about 10:00.

I think I spotted some light snow in the headlights.

Tuesday 26 December

The snow failed to materialize. It's still very cold. I doubt it got above freezing all day. Very overcast and foggy. Kathy and Uschi painted with water colors. Uschi is very good. She even gave us some of her work. Kathy did remarkably well for an amateur. I declined to participate. Instead I spent most of the day entertaining Horst. He was trying to locate a website for Norwegian Forest Cats. Apparently a friend of his is interested in breeding them. I found several, then I had to show him how to send those url's to his friend. At 3:00 we had tea. Imagine that. Ate some candy filled with shnapps. Wow! About 4:00 we returned to Moni's to meet her other daughter, Alice and her partner and their 1 ½ year old boy. Delightful folks. Alice is a corporate attorney and Joe is studying to become a mechanical engineer. He should be finished in about 3 months. I think they plan to marry then. They live in Cologne, about 300 miles from Villingen. He was born in Portugal, but moved to Germany when he was around 5 years old. His mother has since returned there. He speaks Portuguese, German and English.

They had just finished tea so I didn't have to eat again right away, but we had coffee and wine and schnapps. Sybille came for supper around 7:00. We had fondue....beef, pork & chicken. VERY tasty. They don't fry the meat like we do. They cook it in a broth in the pot over the sterno cans. Must try that at home. After supper espresso.

Rudolf showed us photos on his computer of family and homes they had lived in. I am convinced he would move back to America in a heartbeat if it weren't for the medical insurance. He told me repeatedly in the past few days how much he enjoyed living there when he was an ambassador.

Got home about 10:00. I think we are going on another sight-seeing tour tomorrow. I'm just along for the ride, so as Fred says, "Whatever".

Wednesday 27 December

What a gorgeous morning. Sun was shining. The temperature was in the mid 20's and frost covered all the trees. The frost stayed on the trees. The temperature stayed in the mid 20's. The sun, however disappeared by noon. It was terribly foggy.

We all went to a small village about 20 minutes away to visit friends of Horst & Uschi. They are both retired doctors. The man lived in the little town of about 700 people when he was a child, so they returned there after they retired. It so happens that he is a cousin to Moni's husband, Rudolf. Their son and his girlfriend from Berlin were also there. We ate lunch about 2:00. Roast beef and boiled potatoes with a horseradish sauce used like gravy. They have a pretty new home, which Horst designed. From their living room window, which faces the rear of the house, they can see a cemetery and a farm house built in the 1600's. It was too foggy to get a good photo. Out the front door you can see the tower of the church, just 1 block away. I tried to photograph it, but it's almost hidden

in the fog. I believe they told me it was built in the early to mid 1700's. Huge and beautiful. We went inside. There is a story about some blue-blood being held hostage and then murdered and shortly thereafter the church was constructed. I leave it to your imagination as to where the funds for such a project came from.

After dinner I was taken on a 20 mile forced march, uphill both ways!!! I survived, but I was glad the lady doctor was along just in case. Funny. Her husband didn't accompany us. I think he didn't care for the walking scenario either. I would have stayed with him, but he didn't speak English and I didn't speak German so it would have been pointless. Omi, however, got to take a nap. That I could have done!! We were taken into the woods to see a lovely waterfall. It was still running, but some of the water had frozen and made icicles down the ledge. I took pictures, but as it was foggy and dark, they don't really show the beauty.

We got back to the house around 5:00 and had coffee & cake. Oh, boy!! The coffee I enjoyed, but I really didn't need the cake. There was lots of conversation around the kitchen table, but I got bored because I didn't understand any of it and a lot of the talk concerned things that Kathy wasn't interested in either, so she didn't bother to translate. Therefore, I wasn't too involved.

Got back to the house around 7:30. The drive was much slower coming back as the roads were slick from the frost. It's 8:15pm and guess what? It's time to eat !!!!!!!!!!!!!

I stepped outside to have a smoke about 9:00 and the sky is now clear. Where the Hell was that when I wanted to take photos. I heard 3 different bell towers ring the time.

So far, everywhere I've been; everyone's home; has offered me an ashtray, because there was at least one smoker there, except the house where I spend the most time. Oh, well. It's free so Kathy & I will just freeze to death together.

Thursday 28 December

Kathy & I went to bed around 10:00 last night. Like I said, it's warmer in the bedroom. So, we got up about 7:30am. The sun was out this morning but the temperature was cold. 19 F/-7 C. It stayed cold most of the day.

After breakfast Uschi took us on a little trip through the mountains to a museum. Another beautiful drive. This museum is a collection of old farm buildings. Some are replicas, others were taken down from various parts of the Black Forest, and reassembled. It was quite fascinating. Also quite cold. We toured the grounds and were allowed to enter a couple of the buildings. They were as I described earlier. The livestock barn on the ground floor, living quarters in the center, and the hay mow on top. It was too dark to take many photos, but I did get a couple. I kept bumping my head on the rafters. One house had 5 or 6 bedrooms, to house several generations of the family. We drank some kind of hot spiced wine that was blue in color. Pretty tasty and it helped to warm you up. There was also a small ice rink on the grounds where children were skating.

On the return home we stopped at a store in Triberg. It was a wood-carver's shop. Lots of Christmas items. It was a long building and also included a wine cellar which was dug back into the side of the mountain. Most of the things in the store were made by the owner of the shop. Naturally, we bought a few things. They are to be shipped and will hopefully arrive about the same time we get home.

Triberg, supposedly, has the largest suicide rate in Europe. I guess the sun doesn't shine there much.

Got back about 4:00. Tea & cake at 5:00. Then we met some of the family at another nearby town for pizza. The owner is from Italy, so this was real Italian pizza. Each pie was about 10" with thin crust. It was not sliced, so you had to cut it yourself. Had a couple of beers, naturally. Very good. Then the owner, Tony, bought us all a round of some kind of aperitif. It wasn't very good. Glad it was just a shot. The restaurant was over 300 years old.

Observations...

The area where Uschi lives is on a hill, with several rows of homes. They are all multi-level and all have flat roofs. That's so the people above you can see over your house, etc. Much of the grass, even in the mountains is still green even though this is the end of December. There are very few yards and those are very small. The home we visited yesterday had a larger back yard, but that seems to be an exception. I'm told that the grass only has to be mowed a couple of times a year.

Glass windows and doors are interesting. They open two ways. Turn the handle horizontal, and they open like a door. Turn the handle up, and they drop down from the top. Many have Venetian blinds, but they are on the outside of the house. This house is about 2000 square feet, but most homes I note are probably less than 1000, but two or three stories high with steep tiled roofs.

Streets are very narrow. You actually park with your inside wheels up on the sidewalk in order to allow traffic to pass. In many areas there is only room for one-lane traffic if there are cars parked on both sides. Makes it difficult when you meet another car and there's no place to pull over. We passed farm buildings that were so close to the highway you could actually reach out and touch them.

Road signs are interesting. I've figured out most of them. Because the roads are so winding and so many merging roads, there are many signs. I note lots of signs with directions, but rarely do they give a distance. They don't reflect very well, so are difficult to see at night. That's not too good if you don't know the road.

The trains are mostly electric, so they don't make much noise and they are usually only a few cars long, at least the passenger trains I have noticed.

The combined population of Villingen-Schwenningen is around 81,000, each with about 40,000, but 1/2 the area of Emporia.

An interesting sidelight...my Yahoo messenger keeps inviting me to obtain an American Green Card. It shows three pictures; Bush, Clinton & Arnold Schwarzenager. Pick out the US President and win a chance to obtain an American Green Card.

Friday 29 December

Played on the computer most of the day, arranging photos and writing in the journal. It was about 47 F today. Naturally we took the field trip yesterday when it was only 19 F. Breakfast at 10:30, lunch at 2:00, Supper at 8:30. Can't remember if we had tea or not, but I assume we did somewhere in there. Kathy & Uschi went to a water-color class. Uschi is very good, and Kathy did amazingly well. She painted a poppy. The teacher

thought it was very good. On their way home from class Kathy bought us some cigarettes. They were regular Winston, but only 17 in a pack. 5 packs cost 18+ Eu. Patrick came over in the late afternoon and made a DVD of the wedding. Great. My CD player in the laptop decided not to work, so will have to wait until I get home to check it out.

Chatted with Deb for a few minutes as well as Aaron Coester.
Went to bed early. Only warm place is in bed !!!

Saturday 30 December

Kathy & I went downtown and walked around for about 4 hours. The market was going on and people were buying fresh vegetables & fruit, meat, bread, cheese, flowers, etc. It was very much like we would call a farmer's market. I guess this goes on 2-3 days a week. There were also sausage vendors and a lot of people were eating those as they shopped. Boy, they smelled good.

Many of the vendors were in tents, but I saw several really fancy trailers that opened up on the side and looked just like a meat market display case.

We wanted something to warm us up, so we went into a coffee house, but it was packed. We did locate the toilette there, though. So we walked some more and about a hour later we went into a guesthouse café and had some more of that blue wine. The waiter was Italian and was excited to find out we were from America. It's strange, even though Kathy speaks German, whenever she talks to someone, they respond in English.

Apparently she has an American accent and they pick up on that. We bought a few little things. Kathy showed me the theater that her father owned when she was a child. I got a photo of it. The streets were very busy with people shopping. A lot of the stores had sale items outside. We even ran into Rudolf.

There are really a lot of stores downtown. I saw at least 4 pharmacies, a dozen clothing stores, a couple of large department stores, 6 or 8 shoe stores, at least that many book and card shops, dozens of cafes or restaurants and equally as many bakeries and butcher shops. I wonder how they all survive? Especially when you see bakeries side by side. There were offices for doctors, dentists and optometrists, a movie theater and several photography/computer type stores.

Kathy had taken Uschi's cell phone with her so we could call when we were ready to leave. Guess what? The batteries were dead. Kathy had taken a call earlier from Stephani but after that she couldn't make a call. We used a pay phone to call Uschi, but there was no answer so we left a message and hoped they got it. NOT!

So we walked to the place where she had dropped us off and waited a little while, hoping she would get the message. Otherwise we were going to have to walk and I really wasn't looking forward to that. I found another phone and Kathy called again. Thank God they answered and came to save us. I guess we could have taken a taxi, but I was running out of Euros and didn't have any idea how much it would cost.

All in all it was a nice afternoon, in spite of the fact it was very cold.

Sunday 31 December 2006

Took a short drive after noon, back to Donaueschingen where we ate pizza a couple of nights ago. Just a couple of blocks away is the Furstenberg Palace. It was being renovated on the outside but I still got some good photos. The grounds cover several blocks and include a large garden, riding area, stables, park, homes for the employees, etc. In the summer, you can tour the palace. Nearby is the St. Johann Cathedral and the Furstenberg brewery. You see that beer everywhere. Also on the grounds is a well that constitutes the beginning of the Danube river.

Uschi said one day she was walking one of her dogs in the park there, when she met a lady with 3 or 4 dogs running loose. She asked if the lady would mind leashing her dogs. The lady replied, "No. You're in MY park.". Later she realized who she had just met!!! Tonight is New Year's Eve. I've been instructed that we will dress for dinner. Later we'll walk up the hill and watch the fireworks welcome in the new year.

We ate around the coffee table in the living room. I'll try to explain this as best I can. In the center was an electrical appliance, about the size of a large frying pan, with a lid. Only the lid was raised about 2 inches and under it was a heating element. We were given small trays, shaped kind of like a dust pan. Place a slice of cheese, some ham and onions on the tray and insert it into the oven to heat and melt the cheese. Then you scrape it onto a small boiled potato. Sort of like eating fondue; lots of work, but very tasty. We also had some little hot red peppers stuffed with a cream cheese, and, of course, beer.

We watched a concert on TV. It was a full symphony orchestra but the show was much like a Lawrence Welk show, with singing and dancing. Even some of the audience was dancing in the aisles. They played waltz, polka, jitterbug, opera, the whole gambit. It was very enjoyable.

About 11:30 Steffi & her family arrived along with Evie (Evelyne) & her family. Her husband is the chief neurosurgeon at an army hospital. I think he's a Colonel. The daughter, aged 16, is a goalie on the National Women's hockey team and hopes to get to the next Olympics. I told her she needed to put on some weight to be a goalie, but if she wanted the boys, stay just like she is. She's cute. The son, aged 14, is also a hockey player and wants to be a pro. He speaks very good English. He said he needed to because so many of the coaches are American. They both attend an academy about 300 miles from home where they go to school and train.

Everyone walked up the hill and at midnight the sky lit up. We can see most of the whole town from this hill. It was awesome. This was not a sponsored event with a professional display. Rather, everyone in town started shooting off skyrockets. It lasted for about a half hour. I was interested in the fact that I didn't see anyplace to buy fireworks, but everyone had them. I was told you can buy them 3 days before New Year in most any store.

Got to bed about 2:00am. Everyone is coming back here tomorrow.

Monday 1 January 2007

Got an IM from PJ. Chiefs are in the playoffs. How amazing is that?

It rained off and on all day today. Not too cold this morning, but the temperature continued to drop and there was some wind, so it got verrrry chilly as the day went on.

Kathy and Uschi played with modeling clay. They both made angels. I spent most of the day researching places we'd been and where we are going tomorrow. I did watch some ski jumping on TV. Not too exciting when you don't understand the language or care whose participating. Watched a little of a cartoon this morning. The character is Werner. He apparently is kind of an icon here like Homer Simpson. He rides a motorcycle. When I bought the t-shirts for the guys, the clerk mentioned something about him because he's depicted on the shirts. Had tea around 3:00. Took a little snooze about 4:00. The gang arrived about 6:30. We ate mashed potatoes with sauerkraut and leg of goose. We had a nice visit. Kathy is not feeling well. She's had a cold for a couple of days but I think something she ate didn't agree with her. Hope that's all it is. Got a big day planned tomorrow.

Tuesday 2 January

It snowed today, off and on all day. Probably only got about 2 inches total. Today we went to Hechingen to see the Hohenzollern castle. OH, MY!!! It sits on top of a big hill overlooking several villages. We could only drive so far, then had to either walk the last several hundred feet, or take a shuttle bus. We opted for the latter. The castle is enormous. The original one was built in the early 11th century, but was torn down about 1423. Construction of a new one started in 1452. Over the years it belonged to several owners, and eventually was abandoned and turned to ruin. In the early 1800's the Kaiser decided to renovate it and add to it. It was built over a period of several years by several architects. Apparently he raised the funds by begging from all the relatives. Two earthquakes in the 1970's did damage to it, but they are rebuilding as they can with funds from the tours. Following a circular path upwards, we crossed 4 draw-bridges and walked through a winding tunnel before we got inside the courtyard. Yes, there was a moat, but it was only about 8 feet across. Mostly for show, I think. The view from up there was magnificent. We took a tour. They had us put on felt slippers over our shoes so as not to mar the Italian marble floors. I think it was so we would polish the floor for them because you literally had to shuffle along. The tour was all in German, so I had no clue, but Uschi bought me a guidebook that was printed in English. In reading the guidebook I learned that in 2001, secret passages from the original castle were discovered below the ground and since excavated. These are very narrow and contain some rooms that were used to house weapons and artillery, perhaps as late as WW I. Basically, these were the dungeons. One photo in the book shows where stones from the original castle were used for foundation for the second castle and then for the 3rd one. The only surviving part of the original building is the Protestant chapel. Yes, there was also a Catholic chapel. I only got two photos on the inside because, one it was too dark, and two, I wasn't supposed to take any. Hopefully I can scan some of the pictures from the guidebook to give you a better idea of the opulence inside. When the family is in residence, a flag is raised. It's black & white with a black eagle. They weren't there today, but we could see where they resided. We just couldn't go in that part, obviously.

There are several amenities for the public, like restrooms, gift shop & restaurant. Uschi treated us to lunch and some more gluhwein (the blue colored hot wine). Kathy asked me what I would like. I told her a greasy cheeseburger!!! She ordered me schnitzel with French fried potatoes and a salad that included peppers, onions, potatoes, greens, and some kind of an oil dressing. I couldn't eat it all, but it was very good. The two girls had wild ragout with semmel knoedel., (venison with bread dumplings). We bought a couple of things at the gift shop then drove to visit a friend of Uschi's. (for tea and cake, naturally) Actually we had cappuccino and an assortment of pastries. We had a delightful tort, albeit way too big a piece. It was white cake & chocolate cake divided with a cream filling, topped with a jellied fruit including currents, raspberries & blueberries. I couldn't eat it all.

I sent a couple of "teaser" photos of the castle to the girls. Deb wanted to know if we were related. It's quite possible. This family had ties with the Habsburg line to which Sue was connected. Also the Knodel (dumpling) family lived just a few miles from this castle at Ochsenbach, Ludwigsburg, Baden-Wurtemberg.

On the drive home it snowed again. We drove through Rottweil, the oldest town in the county of Wuertemberg and just a few miles from Villingen. Too bad it was dark so I couldn't get any pictures.

The drive to the castle was exciting. We were on the autobahn part of the way, and it's true. We were doing at times 85-90 mph. and getting passed like we were standing still. Another road we took was like Hwy 56 follows the Santa Fe Trail, only this one followed an ancient roman road.

Finally got home around 7:30. Thank God I will not be forced to eat again tonight. Just give me some scotch and let me relax.

Wednesday 3 January

Didn't do too much exciting today. It snowed again this morning, but not much. We had planned to go to Wuerzburg to see where the girls were born, but the weather was threatening and it is about a 3 hour drive so we didn't go. We went downtown for a little while. Uschi had to go to the bank and run a couple of errands. Around the town are pedestals on which statues sit during the summer. While we were waiting for Uschi I had Kathy translate the story written on one of the pedestals. It seems this was a wheelwright who took a bet that he could make a wheel, roll it to Rottweil, eat enough food to equal the value of the wheel and roll it back to Villingen all in one day. He did it and the wheel now resides in a museum. This took place in May of 1562.

I had an interesting experience as we were walking back to the car. I met a young man, 30-40ish. He caught my eye and nodded. As we passed he said, "Hello. How are you today"? I responded, "Fine, thank you". Then it occurred to me what had just happened. I asked Kathy how he knew to speak to me in English. Her comment was something like, "Cowboy boots, Levi's, Jean jacket. What do you think"?

We then took a short drive to a stable where Steffi keeps her horse. It is a very large hunter-jumper type named Othello. We watched her work out and Kathy made vocal

observations. It was obvious that Kathy, the rider/trainer/judge, was back at work, praising Steffi and pointing out minor flaws. Had she been dressed differently I know she would have ridden him around the exercise barn. Standing around on that frozen ground gave me a back ache and frozen toes. Kathy said that's another good reason not to get back into the horse business.

While we were downtown Uschi bought some pastries for our afternoon tea. Turns out that are very similar to what we call a Bismark, only they call it a Berliner. Donut dough filled with jelly.

Two more days and then we'll be heading home. Kathy and I are both ready. We've seen some really wonderful sights, most of which she had seen 50 years ago, but I think she enjoyed it again along with seeing her family, but we have both agreed we're homesick.

Thursday 4 January

Woke up about 5:30. Finally got up and made some coffee and showered. Checked my email and found the office needed help so I spent the next couple of hours on the computer trying to resolve an issue a couple of clients had.

Breakfast at 10:30, lunch at 3:30, dinner at 7:00. It rained today and was very cold, in spite of the fact that the temperature wasn't really that low; about 42 F. I spent most of the day trying to get my photos in order and putting together captions.

Kathy & I treated Uschi & Horst, and Moni & Rudolf to dinner this evening. We first intended to eat at a restaurant attached to one of the towers downtown, but they were closed until tomorrow. I learned that was probably a good thing as they are a little pricey. Instead we went to some Italian restaurant that wasn't too bad. I had some kind of spaghetti and Kathy had pasta with wild boar. We almost had an issue. I gave the waitress my Master Card and she rattled off something in German that I didn't understand, other than something to the effect of "This aint gonna work". She did try to run the card, but she came back shaking her head. Something to do with a new machine and Master Card. Fortunately, Kathy showed her a Visa and that worked. Phew! Well, at least we didn't have to have to go to jail and we didn't have to have tea & cake today. However, after we got home from the restaurant, we opened a bottle of wine and ate chocolate candy with various kinds of fruit flavored schnapps inside...plum, pear, raspberry and cherry. Kathy packed today. I'll have to do that tomorrow.

Friday 5 January

I did some more work on the computer today, trying to get a head start on the travel log. Wednesday I inquired of Delta about the flight number change for our trip home from Atlanta. As of 4:00 today I still had not heard. I tried to call them, but German phones don't understand the 1-800 system. So, Kathy & Uschi decided to go to a local travel agency and inquire about the flight. Naturally, while they were gone, I got an answer from Delta. However, the response did not answer my question. It only posed more.

Fortunately, when the girls returned, they had a confirmation of our new flight number and departure time. It appears we'll be getting home about ½ time of the Chiefs playoff game.

Obviously, we had to have tea and cake in the middle of the afternoon. I don't know how these people ever get anything done. They have to stop and spend an hour eating every few minutes.

Patrick came over this evening. He gave me a CD of the wedding. I hope I can get it to work.

Going home in the morning. Hooray!!!! Not looking forward to the 11 hour flight across the puddle, but will be glad to get home where I can understand TV, leave the lights on if I want, and turn up the furnace.!!!

Saturday 6 January

Arose at 4:30 AM after getting to bed about midnight. I had some coffee, loaded the car and we headed for Zurich. We needed to be at the airport by 7:00. I know why we needed to be there 3 hours early. We had to stand in line with all of our luggage waiting for a passport check. We got all kinds of questions about who packed our luggage, where had it been since we packed it, are Kathy & I traveling together, do we live in the same house, how long had we been in Europe, etc.

Finally got through that check. Then we had to drag our luggage to the ticket counter, which fortunately wasn't very far. We got our ticket and passports checked again and the luggage checked. We still had a carry-on bag, laptop computer, three coats and an oil painting we were lugging around with us. Uschi was still with us at that point, so that helped. Down the hall, up the escalator, around the corner. We located a smoking kiosk; basically a tall, round table with imbedded ashtrays and an umbrella like cover that had an exhaust system. We said goodbye to Uschi and trudged on to the next passport check followed by the security zone. We had to take off our shoes, empty our pockets, take off jewelry, take out the laptop and run everything through the x-ray machine. The alarm went off when I stepped through the metal detector, so I got to go into a little room where I was searched. Must have been my belt buckle.

Anyway, we got re-dressed and collected our belongings and moved on to our gate. Of course, that was up the stairs, up the hall, down the stairs, ride the train, up the stairs, down the hall,

Success, finally. We now had about 2 hours to wait so we located the bathrooms and the smoking lounge and went to have some coffee. Two small cups of coffee cost 8.5 Euros. That's over \$10.00. But, like Kathy informed me, the Swiss have the attitude that if you can't afford us, don't come. The smoking area was a glass enclosed structure with lots of seats and plenty of ashtrays and a ventilating system. I suspect R.J. Reynolds paid for it because there was Camel cigarette ads all over it.

We boarded the plane without further incident. Our seats were next to an emergency exit, so that gave us a little more leg room, but Kathy about froze to death. Then we sat and sat. The plane was 45 minutes late taking off because they were still loading luggage.

I noticed when we were in the terminal, everywhere you looked there were police. When we finally backed out of the gate, we had two police escorts in armored vehicles followed along side us out to the runway and followed us until we lifted off.

The 10 ½ hour flight was generally uneventful. At least the head-phones worked so we watched 4 movies and a couple of TV shows. The plane was packed and they fed us pretty well, but it's still a long time to just sit. I spent my last 20 Euros on scotch.

We landed in Atlanta 45 minutes late and now the Hell begins.

First we had to go through customs. Passport and ticket check. On the plane we were given a declaration form to fill out. Name, rank, serial number, reason for the trip, are we bringing in food or merchandise for re-sale, or alcohol or tobacco, had we been on a farm, etc,etc,etc. We handed that to a officer and got quizzed again and our passports stamped.. Now we have to claim our luggage. Because we were late, a plane from Tokyo was unloaded ahead of ours, so it's wait again. Of course, ours was some of the last off the plane. We located a couple of carts to help us wheel it into another area where it was then taken and put on our connecting flight. Next we had to pass another inspection station where we gave the officer our declaration card. Almost done. Crap! Now we have to go through another strip search. Take off your shoes and jewelry. Empty your pockets, go through the metal detector. The whole nine yards again. The next job was to find what gate we had to go to for the flight to Kansas City. We got that located and the race was on. Down the hall, down the stairs, get on a train, up the stairs, around the corner, down the hall. You guessed it. Our gate was clear at the end. We felt like that O.J. Simpson commercial running through the airport. As we approached our gate, the attendant disappeared through the boarding door. I screamed at her to wait for us, but she either didn't hear or chose to ignore us. A minute later a family of 4 arrived who were also supposed to be on that flight.. So here we sit. We waited about 3 or 4 minutes and a guy reappeared through the door. I explained that we were supposed to be on that plane, but he couldn't have cared less. This was the first plane on our trip that was apparently going to leave on time. He said it was already gone and I cursed under my breath because I could see it still sitting there. Bastards waited 45 minutes to load luggage but wouldn't wait 45 seconds for some passengers.

So, now we have to go all the way back to a ticket counter. The family got there before us and remarked as we dragged ourselves to the counter, that the next available flight would not be for 3 ½ hours, 9:30 Atlanta time, and the plane was already over-booked. Well, we pleaded our case to another ticket agent and she managed to get us on and gave us two \$7.00 coupons for some food. That bought two hotdogs and a couple of drinks. So now we wait. I found a place where I could get internet connection and tried to contact Pam, but I had to pay for the connection to anything outside of the airport webpage. Kathy's cell phone, or "handy" as the call them in Europe, was dead. I needed to let PJ know that we were going to be late as she and Donnie were to pick us up. I finally located a pay phone, after getting more than one wrong answer as to where to locate one. Contacted Pam. She was in a bar watching the Chiefs football game, and monitoring our flight status with her laptop. She knew we had left Zurich late and there was a good chance we would miss our connection.

So, we got to watch the Chiefs game at the airport, although that was not what we had planned. We found a bar and had a couple of drinks and calmed down some. Found the

smoking lounge, which was right across the hall from our departure gate. We finally got a break.

Because the flight was over-booked, they asked for volunteers to wait and take another flight, offering incentives to do so. Kathy & I almost took them up on it since we were so exhausted, but we were really anxious to get home.

Our seats on the plane were clear in the tail end. As we boarded I noticed that other family had purchased 1st class in order to get on board. When we lifted off, I counted 8 empty seats I could see. Go figure!

We got into the terminal at KCI about 10:45. Pam & Donnie were waiting, but we had no idea where our luggage was. I left them to attend to that problem while I went outside to smoke. I met a young girl who needed a light. She had also missed a connection and didn't know where her luggage was either. She was here on a student visa from France and got held up by customs. She asked how I liked Germany and I told her I loved what I saw, it was a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there. She said she had gone home for the holidays and admitted that she kind of missed Kansas and Missouri, too.

It turns out our luggage was on our original flight and had arrived before us.

Went to bed around midnight, concluding another 30 hours of being awake.

Sunday 7 January

We left KC about 10:30. Made a stop for gas and bought some scotch. The dogs were glad to see us and the parrot wouldn't stop talking. I turned on all the lights in the house and Kathy turned up the furnace. God, it's great to be home. About 5:00 we decided to go to Bruff's for something to eat. When we entered, we received applause from the "corner gang"; Cruz, Darrell, "Corky" and Brad, the bartender. That was a nice welcome home. We ate a steak and went to bed at 8:00, which would have been 3:00AM Germany time, but we woke up about 3:00AM Emporia time.

All in all, it was a great trip. The scenery was wonderful and I enjoyed all of Kathy's family. It was pretty obvious they all liked me, too. And that was a good thing. I'm expecting several to come visit us in the next few years.

I did learn one German word. Scheiss. SHIT!!! I used it a few times, especially coming home.

