

More of Helga's Corner

By Helga von Schweinitz

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by Helga von Schweinitz

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A Word to the Reader

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Helga von Schweinitz

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Begin ever so Softly

When a German word or syllable begins with an S which is followed by a vowel like in *Susie*, the S is soft like in *Zoozee*. *Susi singt sieben Solos = ZooZee zingt zeeben zolos*. A sentence (*Satz = zats*) with more meaning would be: *Im Senat sitzen sechs senile Senioren = Im zehnaht zitsen zex zeneele zenieren*.

What is the exception, you ask. Some Germans pronounce words they took from English like they would in English: for them *Sex* is pronounced sex and not zex. *Software* is software. But some speak of zex and zoftware.

The S in other places is sharp like in *Das Gras ist nass*. The exception is the S before p, t, and ch. It turns into shp and sht and sch, like in *springen, stinken, and schwimmen = shpringen, shtinken, and shvimmen*.

Now say this with the proper S sounds:

In der sandigen Sahara stand das Sofa von Soraya.

Helgas Eckchen

(Helga's Dear Little Corner)

The German suffixes *-chen* and *-lein* can be translated as "little" as in *die Maus* - *das Mäuslein* or *das Mäuschen*. They can even be added to names, like in *Fritzchen* and *Gretelein* (short Gretel).

They are mostly used, however, as terms of endearment and are therefore difficult to translate. *Ein Gläschen Wein* is affectionately appreciated, no matter what the size. Both suffixes make all nouns and persons neutral gender: *der Finger*, *das Fingerchen*; *das Fritzchen*, *das Mariechen*.

In some cases, words with *-chen* or *-lein* have taken on a specific meaning: *das Fräulein* is the unmarried woman (no matter what size), *das Könnchen Kaffee* holds two cups of coffee, *das Mädchen* is a girl, endearing or not, and *das Brötchen* is that breakfast roll as German as *Kaiser Wilhelm*.

The special affection that exists between canine and human animals is expressed in the way German dogs address their master and mistress. *Das Herrchen* is the dog's master, *das Frauchen* is his or her mistress. Since our cocker by the name of Whiskey is bilingual, he comes to me lickedy-split when I call "*Komm, Whiskeychen, Frauchen hat ein Stückchen Wurst für dich.*" (Come, Whiskey dear, Mommy has a nice piece of sausage for you).

Wir müssen updaten

Being living works of art, all languages are forever changing. On my recent visit to Germany I noticed that my efforts to find German words for everything we talked about were met with polite smiles. *Englisch* is invading *Deutsch*. That is actually nothing new; early German settlers in Texas said sentences like *Die Cow ist über den Fence gejumpf*. Some expressions are pure German but translated from English in a way English-speakers would not recognize. Take the cell phone; it is not das *Zellentelefon* but das *Handy*, a word that does not even exist in English as a noun. Others are taken from English without changes, but sometimes the pronunciation is unexpected. The fax, for example, is *das Fax*, but it is pronounced to rhyme with bucks.

Der Computer, also called *der Rechner*, has a memory. I called it *das Gedächtnis*, but the proper word is *der Speicher*, like the place where my Oma stored old crates and furniture. To save is *speichern* in cyberspeak, but *sparen* when it comes to money. You can *speichern* many gigabytes on a *Stick* (pronounced shtick). To delete something is *löschen*, which in real life firemen do to fires.

A key is *die Taste* and has nothing to do with English 'poor taste', although you might find it difficult to hit the correct keys since the German computer has a different keyboard, *eine andere Tastatur*. Yet, the musical instrument we call keyboard is not called *Tastatur* in German but *das Keyboard*.

A mouse is *eine Maus*, the screen is *der Bildschirm*, and to click is *klicken*. Many English verbs are simply conjugated and given prefixes, like *verlinken*, *googeln*, *anklicken*, *faxen*. (But note: *Faxen machen* still means "to play the fool")

The good old e-mail turns out to be called *die Mail* (pronounced "male"), and to send an e-mail is *mailen* as in *Ich habe dir drei Mails gemailt*.

Our family has a German *Familien Homepage* with *Serverproblemen*. Speaking of problems: There is the problem with the Start function. In both languages you have to click on Start or *Start* to end whatever your computer is doing

and to turn *das Monstrum* off.

Weise Worte

Wer über spitze Steine stolpert, soll nicht barfuß gehen.

He who stumbles over sharp stones should not go barefoot.

^ (I made that up, Helga)

Das ist ja Spitze!

The noun *die Spitze* has many different meanings in German and many different translations in English, of course.

I asked Germans of the female persuasion what English word came to mind when I say *die Spitze*. Most of them said "lace". Guys, however, said something like "arrowhead" as in *Pfeilspitze*. A four year old bilingual know-it-all (*Alleswisser*) said "Zugspitze" which is the highest mountain in *Deutschland*, 2962 *Meter* on a clear day. The adjective *spitz* was connected by most people to a sharp pencil like in *Der Bleistift ist spitz*.

So, when *Spitze* is not used to mean lace as in *belgische Spitze ist kostbar* or *Arsenik und Spitze ist der Titel einer Kommödie*, then it usually refers to something pointed or somebody or something at the front, on top, in the lead.

Hier sind ein paar Beispiele:

Ein spitzer Bleistift (sharp pencil) ist nicht stumpf.

Clinton und Obama waren die Spitzenkandidaten (front running candidates) der Demokraten.

Spitzensportler (top athletes) trainieren viel.

Many word combinations have taken on a life of their own: *der Spitzbube* is the rascal, *der Spitzname* is the nickname, *der Spitzbart* is a pointed beard (remember Lenin?), *spitzfindig* means subtle. *Der Spitz* is a Pomeranian (dog), *der Spitzel* spies....Dictionaries offer a long list.

How would you translate *Der Händler will Spitzenware kaufen*. Does the dealer want to buy top quality merchandise or lacy items? We *wissen* it not.

One easy and popular way to make frequent use of the word *Spitze* is by casually weaving it into a conversation about pleasant events as you would the English "great!" or "cool!". And if you feel talkative, you expand your joyful exclamations to *Das ist ja Spitze!* Your conversation partner will think you are *absolut Spitze*.

We'd Better Stay Humble!

I knew that not everybody in the world is aware of the greatness of Texas, but I showed my surprise when I met a young man in Rome recently who had never even heard of Texas. However, I felt very small when he proudly told the name of his home country. I had never heard of it, couldn't pronounce it, and now I don't remember it. Lesson: Travelling teaches you how little you know. *Reisen lehrt dich, wie wenig du weisst.*

Der Bulle

The cow is *die Kuh*, the calf is *das Kalb*, the ox is *der Ochse*. Many words describing basic life in our agrarian past are similar in English and German. However, the English and the Germans split ways over bulls and steers. Readers with an expressed or a latent interest in animal husbandry know that a bull is a sexually matured bovine whereas a steer is a castrated young bull. In German, *der Bulle* is a male bovine, but not necessarily the type used for breeding; *der Stier* is a bull with all functions intact, used for breeding and in a *Stierkampf* (bullfight). Oxen and *Ochsen* are both castrated - sorry - so that they can peacefully pull carts and ploughs and be served as hamburgers.

We have many expressions using bulls as images, but we can't translate them literally into German. The bull in the china shop is *der Elefant im Porzellanladen*. If the president takes the bull by the horns, we say *Die Präsidentin packt den Stier bei den Hörnern*.

Since Germany was not invaded by the Normans as England was in 1066, the language did not suffer the impact of French which introduced the refined words beef, pork, mutton and veal for dead flesh. Cattle of any persuasion is *Rind* in German. *Rindfleisch*, therefore, is the meat of cattle, dead or alive.

Germans like to use animals to describe fellow humans. *Du dumme Kuh* is hardly an insult any more, unless you talk to me. When you don't know what to do next you say *Ich stehe hier wie der Ochs' vorm Berge*.

(I stand here like an ox before a mountain).

To refer to a policeman as *der Bulle* is not an insult at all. My favorite TV show is *Der Bulle von Tölz*.

Don't try to translate our "b. s." or simply "bull!". Just say *Unsinn!* (nonsense) and control your anger.

Then there is the papal bull which is female in German: *die Bulle*. But that is another story.

Weise Worte

Quäle nie ein Tier zum Scherz!

Never hurt an animal for fun.

Der airbag

Der airbag? It looks and sounds wrong to me, but I found it printed this way in a German publication: an English noun given a gender but not capitalized like a German noun should be. *Die mail* (when it means e-mail), *das meeting*, *der service...* are more examples. *Das Handy* (cell phone) has been around long enough to feature a capital H.

With modern German I am never sure about what is correct, neither are my friends and relatives in Germany who have to cope with the language every day.

Foreigners trying hard to say everything in German and translating English terms literally, run into problems more serious than spelling. "*Mein Taschenbuch ist gestohlen! Polizei!*" shouted James at a bus station. Only strange looks from other passengers. A *Taschenbuch* is a paperback book, but James had translated pocketbook, his word for billfold, literally, and nobody really cared enough to call the police about a stolen *Taschenbuch*.

Since he tends to be politically liberal back home, James called himself *ein Liberaler* during a discussion in Berlin. For Germans *ein Liberaler* is a right winger promoting free enterprise with little government control. So whatever liberal solutions James suggested for the economic problems of the world (*die Weltwirtschaftskrise*), they did not make much sense coming from a *Liberaler*.

To calm myself down and not worry about the pitfalls of language, I often retire to reading *das Horoskop*. Horoscopes are reliable, at least as far as major expressions are concerned. Mankind is divided into twelve groups based on celestial coordinates at the time of birth. English has given each group a Latin name; German uses down-to-earth German words. Taurus is *der Stier*, Aquarius *der Wassermann*, a child born on the 25th of December is a Capricorn, *ein Steinbock*. My niece twice removed, a single mother, can continue to call herself a *Jungfrau* (Virgo) even after the birth of her second son. Well, in this era of *texten*, *doppelklicken und forwarden* strange *Happenings* occur.

Weise Worte

Auch unverdientes Brot macht satt.

Undeserved bread fills you up too.

Herforder Deutsch

Language is the perfect tool for creating misunderstandings and misery. However, it can also be used to provide solutions – by means not necessarily of what you say but of how you say it, as I found out last year.

Johann, *mein Computer*, must have misunderstood my command because he had not sent off the application I had filled out to reserve a rental car for two weeks in my home town, Herford, in eastern Westphalia. When I tried to pick up my car at the agency, there was none available – no reservation had been received. “*Da könn’n wir ja nix für*,” (It's not our fault) said the lady behind the counter, in the *Herforder Deutsch* which I hadn't heard for so long.

I decided to try the “I’m one of you folks” trick and fell into the local dialect to describe my predicament.

“*Wo ich doch hier bin, wollte ich mit unserm Oppa annen Dümmer. Unser Oppa der is nich mehr so gut aufe Beine, schläft bis in die Puppen, stüsskert den ganzen Tag im Pölter inner Kammer rum, klöhnt mal mit ’m Kriegskameraden an der Strippe oder glotzt für sich hin wie ’n Spökenkieker. Aber ohne Karre wird da ja nix von. Scheibenhonig!*”

“*Mönsch, Sie sind ja von hier weg! Wir Herforder müssen doch zusammenhalten!*” was the pleasant reaction of the agent – “we Herforders have to stick together.”

Ten minutes later I was driving a car off the lot. The manager was in Mallorca, so they let me use his car. It wasn't what I had said but how I had said it.

When I came home to Texas I gave this *Herforder* text to my computer to translate into English with the help of “translate.google.com.” The result was not even funny – *es war absoluter Quatsch*.

I wonder how many of my human readers understood the text. Here it is in English.

“Since I am here, I wanted to drive to Lake Dümmer with our grandpa. Our grandpa is no longer so good on his feet, sleeps into the late hours, stumbles around in his bedroom in his pajamas all day, chats occasionally on the phone with a war buddy or stares like somebody seeing ghosts. But without a car it won’t be possible. Sh-t.”

Weise Worte

Das Leben lehrt uns, weniger mit uns und andern strenge zu sein.

Life teaches us to be less strict with us and others.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Ein Hammer

While many English words have been absorbed by the German language, we also have to take notice of new German words and phrases that have recently become popular.

My *Favorit* is *der Hingucker* (pronounced "hincooker"). *Hingucken* means to look over there. *Ein Hingucker* is something that makes you look at it, an eye-catcher. *Das neue Auto in lila und gelb ist ein echter Hingucker.*

Das Schnäppchen, something you snap up quickly, is a "bargain", appreciated in all cultures. *Die Reise nach Namibia für 899,00 Euro ist ein Schnäppchen.*

Stehen in its sense of "to prefer" instead of just "to stand" is important to be aware of. *Ich stehe auf Latex*, said the interior decorator while she was sitting on a leather couch. She was talking about the material of her tight trousers.

Have you ever tried to explain Velcro in German? It threw me off balance. I had not realized that this Swiss invention of hooks and loops is known in the USA by its brand name. In German it is *der Klettverschluss*. *Eine Klette* is a bur, *ein Verschluss* is a locking device. It does make sense and it is all German.

Multikulti is the word to use when you want Germans to argue among themselves. It refers to the multitude of cultures that make up today's society in Germany. Most people are proud of the tolerance shown there towards different lifestyles, languages and religions. However, since the German education system has scored alarmingly low on international tests, a lively discussion goes on about being intolerant enough to propose that all children be taught German starting early in life, no matter what language is spoken at home. This means a new definition of *Multikulti* for some people. It depends on how *politisch korrekt* they want to be at that moment.

Then there is *der Hammer*, an old word meaning "hammer" in English. But now you can express "great!" "How mean!" "I really like it!" or "I really didn't expect that" by shouting out: *Ein Hammer!* with the appropriate expression on your face. Maybe "wow!" would be a good translation.

Weise Worte

*Spinne am Morgen bringt Kummer und Sorgen. Spinne am Abend, erquickend
und labend.*

A spider in the morning brings sorrow and worries. A spider at night is
refreshing and comforting.

Der Eintopf

Browsing through some old books at our library's sale, I read that Adolf Hitler declared one Sunday of every month as *Eintopfsonntag*. Families, restaurants and even vendors in public places were supposed to serve *ein Eintopfgericht* (a one-pot-dish) on that day with profits going to charity. That elevated this meal from the once-a-week favorite of common people to being accepted in the highest circles of urban society.

As a child in Germany during and after WWII,

I loved the *Eintopf* which my *Oma* (grandmother) served at least every Saturday - *sonntags nie* - (never on a Sunday). It usually consisted of *Reste* (leftovers) including *Kartoffeln* (potatoes) from Friday, *Gemüse je nach Jahreszeit* (vegetable according to season), some *Fleisch* (meat), but not much, some herbs and *eine Zwiebel* (an onion). All of that went into a big pot of beef stock, lid on top, and after a few hours the aroma of this soupy stew brought people to the kitchen table, often unexpected guests as well.

There is such a variety of *Eintopf* dishes! *Erbsensuppe* (pea soup) and *Linsensuppe* (lentil soup) and other thick soups made of *Hülsenfrüchte* (legumes) are available all through the year and said to be good for the brain.

My favorite to this day is a one-pot dish called *Schnippelbohnen*. I have never found it offered here in the States. It consists mainly of diagonally sliced green beans which are placed with layers of salt in a stone pot for weeks until they turn lightly sour, just like Sauerkraut. German supermarkets offer *Schnippelbohnen* in cans, and some restaurants feature them in their *Eintopf* section on the menu.

Eintopf is now considered a convenient, healthy choice for meals that are meant to feed and satisfy many people without fanfare. My home town church celebrates Founder's Day every year in late November with nothing but hefty portions of *Grünkohl mit Wurst* (Kale with sausage). A tasty fundraiser.

Oma managed to serve some type of *Eintopf* several times a week after the

war even when there was hardly anything to put into the pot. She had almost 30 years of experience with preparing meals on good and bad days by the time Hitler became a German citizen and - a few years later - declared the *Eintopf* fit for Sunday dinner.

Weise Worte

Sag deinem Freund nicht, was dein Feind nicht wissen soll. (Arabian)

Don't tell your friend what your enemy is not supposed to know.

Die Zivis

At the time of this writing, *Februar 2011, die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* still has *die Wehrpflicht* (military draft) for young men. That creates a big pool of gentlemen who, though fit enough to become *Soldaten* in the *Bundeswehr*, are smart enough to convince the authorities that their conscience won't let them bear arms.

They don't have to flee to *Kanada* or go underground: They can serve their time as civilians (*im Zivildienst*) as so-called *Zivis* in hospitals, nursing-homes, the forest service, orphanages ... the list is long. I experienced their usefulness when my husband was in a rehab clinic for mobility-impaired patients in Germany a few months ago. Many an elderly woman there enjoyed just looking at these healthy guys in their neat white suits. They lifted heavy patients with ease from the *Bett* into the *Rollstuhl* (wheelchair), they wheeled patients into a park for fresh air and sunshine.

Meine Tante Hilde, slightly demented *im Alter von siebenundneunzig* (at age 97), adored and loved *Zivi Oliver* in her nursing-home and thought he was her *Enkelsohn* (grandson). He even played her favorite songs on the piano for her to sing along to. One of my nephews fed and cleaned paralyzed stroke victims in the *Krankenhaus* (hospital), another one drove an ambulance.

Zivis get about 600 euros per month, I was told – not a living wage. Most of them have to live at home.

Now comes *das Problem!* *Deutschland* is about to do away with the draft and thus lose *die Zivis*. Who will replace these affordable helpers?

Ein soziales Jahr (a year of social service) for men and women *wird diskutiert* (is being discussed). The chief physician in a sports clinic with mainly male patients is working on another proposal, at least for his clinic: Import a few dozen of those poor but physically well endowed, cheerful beauties he met on the beaches of Brazil. He told me: „*Mokkabraune Mädchen machen müde Männer munter.*“

Weise Worte

Humor ist wenn man trotzdem lacht.

It is humor when one laughs nevertheless.

Der Slip

Once the "unmentionables", we can speak of them nowadays - even in polite society - as panties, briefs, knickers, bloomers and whatever else comes to mind. However, beware of what you call various undergarments in German when you have to shop for them after you landed in Berlin or Frankfurt and your suitcase didn't.

Ein Slip, you should know, is not the skirtlike piece of underwear but a pair of panties. A slip is *ein Unterrock* (but not if it was a Freudian slip).

To slip is *schlüpfen* in German; so you might assume that *der Schlüpfer* is the slipper. *Pustekuchen!* (that's not so!) *Schlüpfer* is another word for the *Slips* that are panties. Slippers are *Schlappen* or *Pantoffeln*. *Verwirrt?* (confused?) You can simply use the basic words *der Unterrock* (underskirt), *das Unterhemd* (undershirt), *die Unterhose* (underpants) (with *Unterhöschen* as a term of endearment).

These garments are collectively called *Unterwäsche* (underwear). Linguistically, *Wäsche* has to do with washing, and our anthropological curiosity wonders why English-speaking people use the verb "to wear" in connection with underwear, while speakers of German are more concerned to emphasize that the garments need to be washed eventually.

You may find yourself in a situation where you have to buy a bra. "Bra" is a short version of a French word which very few Americans can spell or pronounce (and which doesn't mean the same thing in French anyway). Germans have not yet completely accepted it as part of their language. They use an abbreviation of the German word *Büsten-Halter* (bust holder), which is *der BH*.

The problem with buying a *BH* or any other piece of *Unterwäsche* is finding the right *Größe* (size), because designations for them are different from ours. Look for the fitting-room, *die Anprobe*.

Weise Worte

Das Leben lehrt uns, weniger mit uns und anderen strenge zu sein.

Life teaches us to be less strict with us and others.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Wohlfühl-Urlaub

Der Urlaub is the vacation. Most Germans have to give their *Urlaub* a theme or purpose. Since trying to become fit and to feel well is in, magazines advertise opportunities to indulge in such noble efforts like *Wohlfühl-Urlaub in einem Wellness Hotel in der Toscana*. *Wohlfühlen* means to feel well. A few years ago they would have talked about a *Wellness-Urlaub*, but there is a new trend to use more German words. They should try a little harder.

Ads include *Akupressur*, *exotischer Joghurt (mit h)*, *Dinkelflakes* (spelt), berries in *Beeren-Shakes*, *cremen für den Lifting-Effekt*, *kalorienreduzierte Dips mit Sticks*, *orale Pillen für die Vaginalflora* and *Nordic Walking für den Stoffwechsel* (metabolism). Highly recommended is to eat a lot of *Bio-Sprouts* (organic sprouts).

One has the impression that topics concerning *Gesundheit* (health) and *Medizin* were developed in *Amerika* and that therefore so many English words crept in. However, the areas of science, medicine and a healthy life style used to be dominated by Germans to such a degree, that if you studied medicine or pharmaceuticals in the USA, you had to take courses in German.

Here are some names - *man kann sie alle googeln*: *Bayer* (Aspirin), *Robert Koch* (bacteriologist); *F.L. "Turnvater" Jahn* (gymnastics educator); *Sebastian Kneipp* (hydrotherapist); *Dr. Ferdinand Herff* (German immigrant to Texas who was the first to sterilize his hands and instruments before an operation).

The long history of *Homeopathie in Deutschland* is still continued by physicians and pharmacies specializing in this popular long-term treatment.

When you have the sniffles on your next visit to Germany, enter a pharmacy called "*Homeopathische Apotheke*". You'll love the attention and all the tinctures, pills, teas and aromas they'll recommend. -----*Gesundheit!*

Weise Worte

Einigkeit macht stark.

There is strength in unity.

Der Tante-Emma-Laden

This has nothing to do with the famous merchant family which claimed Osama bin Laden. *Der Laden* is simply German for "the store".

Emma used to be a very common name, and many people had an aunt they called *Tante Emma*. Somehow, maybe one can google it, the little grocery store in a neighborhood became known as *der Tante-Emma-Laden*. That sets it apart from the larger *Supermarkt* and major chains like "Aldi".

These little *Läden* can be part of a chain as well, like the "Edeka" in my old neighborhood. *Um 7 Uhr morgens* my husband walked there for *frische Brötchen*, those crispy buns that make Germany so special. Some neighbors combined that stroll with taking their dog for his constitutional. Later, on the way home from work, some *Schampoo, ein halbes Pfund Butter, zwei Heringe und eine Illustrierte* (magazine) might have been the purchase.

Sehr wichtig (very important) is its role as a source of neighborhood information. I had inherited a house from an uncle and listed it for sale (*zu verkaufen*) with an agent (*Makler*) in that area. After three months he had not yet found a *Käufer* (buyer). In my American "do-it-yourself" way I flew to Germany and told the manager of the *Tante-Emma-Laden* down the road from my uncle's house that it was *zu verkaufen*. I had a *Käufer* (buyer) that same evening. *Fräulein Hellmann*, I was told, living in an apartment across the street from that house, was expecting a baby from her new *Partner* (rumored to be Russian but hopefully not involved *mit der russischen Mafia*), and they were talking marriage. *Sie bezahlte bar*, cash!

Maybe our new convenient store at the gas station down the road can become my little *Tante-Emma-Laden* here in Pflugerville, Texas.

Weise Worte

Was hilft laufen, wenn man nicht auf dem richtigen Weg ist.

What good does running do, if you are on the wrong path.

Deutsches Sprichwort

Die Wurst

When a German takes a bath and then goes to have supper, he goes from *Bad* to *Wurst*.

Wurst, (voorst, often pronounced voorsht), sausage, is indeed a favorite for *Abendbrot*, with its many varieties sliced as cold cuts or smeared on some hefty bread. The mere thought of *Leberwurst* and *Teewurst* makes me *hungrig*.

Recipes were developed centuries ago to preserve mainly pork and beef with salt and spices and stuffed into washed intestines. They vary regionally and from butcher to butcher.

The most venerable symbol of German fast food is *die Bratwurst* - if grilled over coal it is *die Rostbratwurst*.

In the 1950s, when I was a penniless German teenager, and meat was not on our table every day, vendors at some street corners spread a powerful whiff of *Bratwürste* being grilled. That made me save the *Pfennige* I earned until I could buy one. It came and still comes with a *Brötchen und Senf* (hard roll and mustard). These days you can choose curry sauce instead of *Senf* and call it *Currywurst*.

Some *Bratwurst* vendors are now mobile, carrying the grill and supplies in front of their tummy, walking in pedestrian zones. Handicapped persons (*Behinderte*) in wheel chairs have that grill on their lap.

A hot dog is "a little sausage", *ein Würstchen*. Bologna is simply "meat sausage", *Fleischwurst*, and usually comes in a circular shape. Cut into pieces, tossed in oil, vinegar and chopped onions, it is served as *Wurstsalat*. Our butcher put a nice chunk of *Fleischwurst* into my hand whenever I - as a child - went there to pick up our *Sonntagsbraten* (Sunday roast).

A word as common as *Wurst* has taken on many other meanings, of course. *Das ist mir Wurst* means that I don't care one way or another.

On a slow day when you just putter around the house, you mumble to

yourself: *Ich wurstele nur so im Hause herum.*

One special feature of the *Wurst* is often mentioned in a conversation: *Alles hat ein Ende, nur die Wurst hat zwei.* Everything has an end, only the sausage has two.

Existentialismus

If you want to wax eloquent in German and give the impression of being well educated, make frequent use of words that end in *-ismus*. You know their meaning from English: *Existentialismus* = existentialism; *Kapitalismus* = capitalism. They are all of the masculine gender (*der Nationalismus*), and when you pronounce them, the stress is on the *-is* (the *s* is sharp): *der Alkoholismus*.

Please note: When within a conversation you compare one *-ismus* with another *-ismus*, the emphasis is on the first syllable: “*Ja, ja, ja, Monotheismus versus Pantheismus!*” and then you roll your eyes and head for the table with the appetizers. You might suggest a more puzzling topic, such as *Kommunismus versus Pessimismus*.

Besides rehashing recent and long-ago soccer games, many Germans idle their time away by discussing highly theoretical topics of no consequence. *Pazifismus in Washington? Nein, nie, never. Nudismus im Pentagon? Quatsch.*

My first deep interaction with *-ismen* (*Plural von -ismus*) occurred when I fell in love with the new French teacher in my school, Herr Dr. Gieseling. I was seventeen, he was fresh from the university. He taught an elective course on Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, which meant that he presented *Existentialismus* and hinted at *Nihilismus und Atheismus und Individualismus*. Of course, I never revealed my adoration to him. I have since married and hardly ever dream of a secret encounter with Dr. Gieseling, but the ideas he implanted in me in this course are still active in my mind: One does not exist except in that moment when one launches oneself out of one’s self and is one’s true self, or something like that.

I am still waiting for that moment – or did I miss it when it happened?

Weise Worte

Alles in der Welt lässt sich ertragen, nur nicht eine Reihe von schönen Tagen.

Everything in the world can be endured, except for a sequence of beautiful days.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Pfanni

If you are entertaining an interest in potato dumplings, read to the end. German has at least 76 words that begin with the letters *pf* like in *Pfennig* and *Pfund* (penny and pound). Many non-Germans find that hard to pronounce, so they leave out the p: “*fluecken*” instead of “*pfluecken*” (to pluck).

However, if you leave out the f, you almost have the English word for many of them. That is a great tool to increase your vocabulary. *Der Pflug* = plough; *die Pfanne* = pan; *die Pfalz* = Palatinate; *der Pfad* = path; *der Pfeffer* = pepper; *die Pfeife* = pipe; *die Pflaume* = plum; *pflanzen* = to plant; *das Pferd* = ?? (Is there an English word for horse beginning with p?) *die Pflicht* = looks like it should mean plight, but it means duty, obligation - makes me wonder.

It seems extremely difficult for Americans to cope with an l after the pf: *pfl*. Since I live in Pflugerville, Texas, I often receive mail addressed to Phlugerville or Plugerville. Pflugerville was founded by the Pflueger family from Oldenburg. The *pf* issue is like a logo for the little town since everything beginning with an f is now beginning with *pf*. There is the local newspaper, the “Pflag”, the Pfarmers Market, the 5 K Pfun Run and the Pfourth-of-July Pfirework on you know what day. Showing no respect for German grammar, Pflugerville features an annual Deutschen Pfest with three days of pfun for the entire pfamily. As a loyal resident, I now begin my Christmas letters with *Pfroehliche Weihnachten*.

A German company by the name of “Pfanni” which makes very good mixes for potato dumplings and potato pancakes (*Kartoffelknoedel* and *Kartoffelpfannkuchen*). For its products to be properly acceptable in English speaking countries, they changed the name on the export boxes to “Panni” - without the f – because people pronounced the real name “Fanni”. There are few wives who would offer their hubby something for dinner that sounds like “fanny dumplings”.

Weise Worte:

Dem Glücklichen schlägt keine Stunde.

When you are happy, you ignore time.

Das public Viewing

Strolling through Herford, my home town, in June of 2012, I noticed signs with an arrow pointing to the market square before the *Rathaus*. The words on the signs were “Public Viewing”. Who died, I thought, imagining a person of stature lying in state. Then I saw the same signs in Wiesbaden a day later and inquired about the mysterious person lying in state in two towns for public viewing. “*Das ist wegen dem Fußball*“, I was finally told. I knew Europe was gripped by the fever of one of those all important soccer championships: *die Europameisterschaft im Fußball*. The games were played in *Polen und in der Ukraine*. It has developed into a *Kult* for mainly young Germans to watch the games on big screens by gathering in public places where they suffer the agony of defeat or the bliss of victory of their team together with hundreds or thousands of other *Fußballfans* - with “fan” being adopted into German. Again I had been tricked into interpreting a new German phrase with the original American meaning. *Public Viewing* means that the public gets together to watch an event on big screens. (*Viewing* is a noun and capitalized.) It is not a matter of national pride, but rather enjoying a big get-together. After the game *Deutschland gegen Italien* my family happily celebrated Italy’s victory with bottles of Chianti because the Italians had been the better team.

This misunderstanding made me think of the thousands of words that have recently been absorbed into German, but I also reflected on English words that have been used for generations without any fuss: Public toilets are found by looking for the letters *W C*. That stands for “Water Closet”, Germanized to *Wasserklosett*, which is then shortened to *Klo*. *W C* maintains the English *C*. (A plumber named Crapper allegedly invented the flush toilet). The useful phrase to learn is *Wo ist das Klo?*

Das Make-up is *Verschönerung durch kosmetische Mittel*. You can say *Helene trägt ihr Make-up sehr dezent*. *Made in Germany* is very much a German phrase ever since Britain’s Marks Act of 1887 required it to be stamped on everything manufactured in Germany. It is so much easier to use than *In Deutschland hergestellt* and easier understood by the people of the world, who soon

took it to mean as much as "of very good quality", *beste Qualität*.

The English language has helped Deutsch to be very flexible and alive. But we don't want German to one day lie in state for public viewing. *Das wäre nicht cool.*

Weise Worte

*Die Engel, die nennen es Himmelsfreud;
die Teufel, die nennen es Höllenleid;
die Menschen, die nennen es - Liebe*

The angels, they call it delight in heaven;
the devils, they call it grief in hell;
people, they call it - love
Heinrich Heine

Die Currywurst

“Californians Discovered German Food” said a recent newspaper article. It did not mention *das Wiener Schnitzel* (a veal or pork cutlet beaten into a large, flat file, salted, peppered, breaded and fried), nor *die Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte* (Black Forest cherry cake with a lot of whipped cream and a shot or two or three of *Kirsch-Likör*). It did not talk about *die Leberknödelsuppe* (liver dumpling soup), nor about *Sauerbraten* (marinated beef roast). It raved about *die Currywurst*.

Curry is a mix of spices originating probably in *Indien*. Its *Aroma permeates* certain neighborhoods in England, which are home to groups of Indian or Pakistani *Immigranten*. It became a common addition to many an otherwise tasteless English dish. A British soldier stationed in Berlin introduced the powder to a lady friend shortly after WW II. She added it to ketchup, which was also new to Germans, and: *Mensch Meyer!!!* (vow!), she had created something soon to be known as *Currysoße* (curry sauce). Poured over a *Rostbratwurst* (grilled bratwurst), it soon made *die Currywurst* one of the most popular fast foods in Germany. *Bratwurst* was already a staple in the German diet as soon as meat became available after the war, and brats can now be found in American stores.

You can create your own version of *Currysoße* if you don't find it in your *Supermarkt*. You should actually start by making your own ketchup. One of the *Rezepte* says, you first take four boiled tomatoes out of a can and squash them with your bare hands into a pulp into a saucepan. Try it – it gives life a new dimension.

I can imagine *Kalifornier* squashing *Tomaten* to get to their individualized *Currywurst*, but when I, living in Texas, can't resist the urge to have one, I zip to “Das Café” in downtown Pflugerville near Austin, plant myself at one of their four tables and order a *Wurst* with fries on the side: “Eine Currywurst mit Pommes, bitte.”

Weise Worte

Man liebt einen andern nicht, wenn man nichts von ihm annimmt.

You don't love a person if you don't accept anything from him.

Die Ehre

In most situations you can translate *Ehre* with “honor”. To honor is *ehren*, and honest is *ehrlich*.

However, Germans have some uses of the word that are different from American words in certain settings: Mary is the president of the tennis club; it is a volunteer position. *Maria ist Präsidentin des Tennisvereins; das ist eine ehrenamtliche Position.* As you see, if a German volunteers to do something without pay, (s)he considers it an honor (*eine Ehre*) to be allowed to serve that way. They feel that people put their trust in them when they serve as *Kassierer* (treasurer) or *Schriftführer* (secretary) or when they hold any other official position in your club, church or other affiliations. *Das Rote Kreuz* (Red Cross) und *die Heilsarmee* (Salvation Army) offer good opportunities to work *ehrenamtlich*. Texans have the German-Texan Heritage Society which is in need of more folks to help *ehrenamtlich*. (www.germantexans.org)

America is known as the land of volunteers, and Germans often marvel at what gets done here which in Germany usually the government pays for – like Meals on Wheels, *Essen auf Rädern*.

There is another translation of volunteer: *freiwillig*. The volunteer firemen are *die Freiwillige Feuerwehr*. *Soldaten in der Bundeswehr sind Freiwillige*, just as soldiers in the American Armed Forces are volunteers. They were not drafted, and they are paid.

A German *Voluntär* is an intern learning a trade.

Ehre is a concept which changes its meaning depending on the culture and time period to which it refers. You might have read about the father in a Muslim country who killed his daughter after she was raped. He wanted to restore his family's honor. Christian Europe had many different interpretations of *Ehre* through the years: If you have an ancestor who has *Vater unbekannt* (Father unknown) on the birth certificate, you might have blue blood in your veins, because

generations ago the *Ehren-Kodex* of a Prussian officer who was of noble blood, demanded that he not stoop as low as marrying the girl or woman bearing his child, if she was a commoner. *Heutzutage* (nowadays), if a man gets a girl pregnant (*schwanger*), he might marry her to make an “honest woman” out of her. That is a phrase not used in German.

Speaking of *Ehre* – *Es war mir eine große Ehre*, <Helga's Corner> *für den Schulhaus Reporter zu schreiben.*

F K K

Frei-Körper-Kultur (free body culture) means running around naked and elevating it to a cultural event. It happens in homes, but in Germany also in public within dedicated areas called *F K K*. We have nudist camps and parks in America, but they are not frequented by as many people as in Germany. Austin, that weird town in Texas, has “Hippy Hollow” where clothes are optional, but few straight folks venture there. In Germany there is no snickering (*kichern*) when you hear about a couple spending their vacation in a nudist resort. The best of them are along the German coast of the Baltic Sea (*Ostsee*), where during socialist times many beautiful stretches of beach were reserved as “*F K K Strand*”, and they are kept as such after Germany united.

Other areas are not officially dedicated for that life style, but one uses them in beautiful weather. A group of Texan high school students were sightseeing in Munich one sunny day in July when they ambled in the part of town where in the fall the *Oktoberfest* takes place. There is an extensive lawn, *die Wies’n*. The young Texans soon realized that they were surrounded by naked bodies of both sexes and all ages lying on the grass. Obviously, locals were taking advantage of the healthy sunshine and exposed as much skin as possible. The poor teenagers were embarrassed and did not know where to direct their eyes. One of the boys told me years later that he still feels guilty about seeing what he could not avoid to look at.

All creatures great and small (*die großen und die kleinen*) are born naked, even the Baptists, but culture wraps us in concepts of what is proper. On a trip along the Adriatic coast of *Jugoslavien* with American friends, we checked into an elegant hotel and went to the pool for a before-dinner-splash. *Mensch!!!* Everybody in and around the pool was nude (*nackt!*), and they all talked German. I realized then that the three big letters “*F K K*” over the entrance indicated the nature of the hotel to German tourists. One of our guys, John, decided that he was not going to sit on a chair where most likely one of those shameless (*schamlos*) *nekkit* guys had sat with a bare bottom. So we all checked out and moved to a “decent” hotel (*ein anständiges Hotel*).

“They should at least act Christian like: wear a fig leaf (*ein Feigenblatt*) like Adam and Eve”, preached John. “Actually, *two Feigenblätter*, one for the front (*vorne*), one for behind (*hinten*)”.

Wauwau

You would be wrong if you assumed that animals have the same language all over the world. Just listen to a German shepherd bark. Der Schäferhund in Berlin bellt “wau wau”, his cousin in Washington barks “wuff wuff”.

Germany is a country of dog lovers. In many restaurants dogs are welcome. They settle down under the table close to their owner’s feet, and usually they are served a bowl of water. Some stores, even major department stores, supply water bowls and leash hooks so dogs can be comfortably left outside for a while. A sign might say *Für den lieben Hund* (For the dear dog).

A popular breed is *der Dackel* (dachshound or Wiener dog). *Dackel* are considered intelligent (*intelligent*). My own *Dackel*, Schnapsi, is an exception. In the wee hours of the morning he tenderly walks all over my body and then sniffs my face to find out if I am still asleep. He is too dumb (*dumm*) to realize that he is waking me up. Or is he?

German dogs would, of course, not have a mistress or a master. They have *ein Frauchen und ein Herrchen*, terms of endearment of Frau and Herr.

You are aware of the close relationship between humans and their pets. *Kinder* (children) call dogs *Wauwau*, and *Wauwau*s return the hugging and kissing whenever needed and they understand a troubled soul without asking for an explanation.

A few months ago, our friend Freddie was our house guest (*Hausgast*) for a few weeks. Born in Dresden, Germany, he had emigrated to *Kanada* as a young man and is spending his retirement years visiting old friends around the world. Tired after a long flight from Toronto, he slumped on the couch. Within a few seconds, our *Schnapsi* jumped on his lap (*Schoß*) and whined and licked and rubbed and sniffed Freddie and acted as if he had just found a long lost loved one. Freddie stiffened up, but then he wrapped his arms around the animal and called out: “*Mein Wauwau, mein Wauwauchen. Komm, mein lieber Wauwau!*” They embraced and were inseparable for the rest of the evening, Freddie hugging and stroking happy

little Schnapsi and almost crying with emotion.

Later I found out that our friend, now in his mid-seventies, had survived the fire bombing of Dresden in 1945. While more than 35,000 people had died in those two nights, he and his mother had escaped, but his little doggie, his *Wauwau*, had not. Or had he? In the chaos of looking for safe shelter, food and grandfather, the boy did not ask his mother about the fate of the dog. He was afraid of the answer. Our Schnapsi brought those traumatic days back to Freddie, and the pent-up mourning for the loss of his *Wauwau* found relief. Our *Dackel* lapped up with great appreciation all the affection that our friend now bestowed on him in memory of his *Wauwau* of years ago, and they took long walks together every day of Freddie's visit.

Schnapsi *ist reinrassig* (a pure bred), but a *Promenadenmischung* (alley mix) can be just as lovable. *Der Pudel, der Terrier, der Spitz und die Dogge* are often mixed with handsome results.

Dog poop used to be a major problem on sidewalks in German towns, but new laws have improved that. One is supposed to pick it up. Another law limits how many dogs you want to have, because you have to pay a *Hundesteuer* (dog tax) for each one.

It is time to stop writing because Schnapsi is nibbling on my toes telling me that we must *Gassi gehen*: he wants to take me for a walk for his constitutional. (I'll pick it up, of course, like a good German-American *Frauchen* should).

Weise Worte

Jeder muss den Mut der Überzeugung haben.

Everybody must have the courage of conviction.

Alexander von Humboldt

Das Bratkartoffelverhältnis

Was ist das denn!?

Bratkartoffeln are fried potatoes, *das Verhältnis* is the relationship. I'll talk about the meaning of that combination later.

Let's first look at *die Kartoffel* (potato). Introduced in Prussia by Frederick the Great (*Friederich der Große*) in the 18th century, it became the most satisfying and popular staple in Germany. A few years ago, too many German restaurants offered them mainly in the form of French fries, *Pommes frites* or simply *Pommes*. This year, 2013, I found my soul food again on the *Speisekarten* (menus) as *Salzkartoffeln* (peeled and boiled in saltwater), *Kartoffelsalat*, *Kartoffelbrei* (mashed), *Folienkartoffeln* (baked in foil) and *Bratkartoffeln mit Speck und Zwiebeln* (fried potatoes with bacon and onions). *Pellkartoffeln* (boiled in their skin) are often served at home, but rarely in restaurants.

If a young man has a relationship (*ein Verhältnis*) with a young girl which includes that he frequently goes to her house at suppertime when *Bratkartoffeln* are often served to use up the leftover *Salzkartoffeln* from an earlier meal, he has then a *Bratkartoffelverhältnis*. It usually means that he is well accepted by the girl's parents. Parents might go to the movies (*ins Kino*) later in the evening to give the young people a chance to be alone to play cards or to do a puzzle or whatever they can think of. I was rather surprised in recent years when I realized that in Germany the *Bratkartoffelverhältnis* often means that the guy spends the rest of the night in the girl's room with her parents' blessing.

In the olden days (*in früheren Zeiten* when I was young), intimacies were forbidden fruit and passionately enjoyed. Two years before he met me, Hans, my husband, then a strapping young German man of 21, had a *Bratkartoffelverhältnis* with Liesel in Wiesbaden. He decided to emigrate to *Amerika*, and Liesel was to follow him as soon as he had established himself. But Liesel never joined him and sent him a Dear John (*Lieber Hans*) letter. So he married me.

About nineteen years after his departure from Wiesbaden, we invited Erika,

an international student from the university, for Thanksgiving. She told us that she was from Wiesbaden and knew nothing about her father other than that he was an American with a German background. When she mentioned her mother's name, an alarm bell rang in Hans' memory box, and he frantically calculated the months from his last evening with Liesel to Erika's date of birth. It turned out that Erika was born eleven months (*elf Monate*) after Liesel's and Hans' *Abschiedsabend* (farewell evening). *Sie war also nicht seine Tochter*, not his daughter. *Nur der liebe Gott weiß, warum in der Nacht „nichts passiert ist“*. (Only the Good Lord knows why „nothing happened” that night. And that's how the lowly *Bratkartoffel* makes history.

Deutsch auf hoher See

While crossing *den Pazifischen Ozean* on the “Star Princess” recently, my ears were delighted to hear so much German spoken on the high seas. These *Passagiere* had flown to Los Angeles non-stop over the *Nordpol* and boarded the *Schiff* the next day. They seemed to travel in families, not as an organized group. Having plenty of leisure time, I tried to listen in on their conversations to figure out, from which area of Germany they came. When they talked to me, they tried to speak high German, but among themselves, their local dialect dominated.

An elderly couple at our dinner table had grown up in the same low-income housing project in Berlin. They got married and immigrated to the USA where he made millions in real estate. One evening he was late for dinner. His wife angrily hissed: “*Wat haste denn so lange inne Spielbank jemacht?! “ “Dat jeht dir nüscht an,”*” was his response, and they switched to accent free American. (“What did you do in the casino for so long?” “That’s none of your business”)

Rähschen uff Hawaii?! Da hätten wir ooch in Dräsdén bleiben können. (Rain in Hawaii?! (For that we could have stayed in Dresden.) I remembered that folks from Saxony have a tendency to complain, but with humor. They toured Pearl Harbor with umbrellas brought all the way from home.

When a tall, handsome gentleman greeted me at the breakfast buffet with *Moin Moin*, I knew he was from *Hamburg* and had wished me a good morning. I said *Hummel Hummel*, and he responded with *Mors Mors*. That is a greeting one can’t translate. We both preferred an early breakfast while our spouses slept *bis in die Puppen* (until late). He asked if I had time *zum klönen* (to chat), and since I understand the *Hamburger Platt* pretty well, he enjoyed *snacken wie bei miene Modder* (talking just like at my Mother’s), drinking three cups of *Tee*.

A couple from Bavaria, both retired teachers, switched easily from their version of high German to how they talk at home, a language I have trouble understanding. One day near the pool, she tried to convince him of something she had just read in a magazine. He kept shaking his head, and finally he slowly got up from his lounge chair, and, as he dove into the water, he shouted *Schmarrrrrrrrn!!!!*

That is Bavarian for nonsense. The word - not its meaning - reminded me of the delicious Austrian dish *Kaiserschmarren*, a torn up pancake made with lots of eggs, and I rushed to the buffet on deck 14 and ordered me one right there *auf hoher See*.

O wundervolle Runkelrübe

Deutschland, das Land der Dichter und Denker. I see the greatest poet and thinker in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 – 1832). Whether Faust argues with Mephisto about the meaning of life, or a *Knabe* (boy) learns that roses have thorns, the simple language with *Rhythmus und Reim* (rhyme) lifts Goethe's readers' spirit.

For a while I read a poem by Goethe every evening before closing my eyes. I also read the English translations in the same book. Du liebe Zeit! Some translations are admirably good, but others!:

“*Sah ein Knab' ein Röslein steh'n*
Urchin saw a rose – a dear“
„*Seht den Felsenquell*
See the mountain spring
Freudehell
Flash gladdening”

Balladen are a favorite of mine. Besides having *Rhythmus und Reim* they tell a story: *Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind?*

Or *Es war ein König in Thule.....*
There lived a king in Thule.....

Recently I come across too many poets who can't even rhyme, not to mention *Rhythmus*.

Ein Gedicht als Exempel :

Früh am Tage, spät
Early in the day, late
am Morgen.
In the morning.
Und?
And?

In search of good folksy poems I dug up some old magazines like *Die Hausfrau* and also nostalgic regional publications written for the generation that includes many thousands of refugees from parts of Germany which were given to Poland or Russia after WW II like Silesia (Schlesien). Speaking of down to earth: In *Jahrbuch der Schlesier 2014* I read that a man in *Schlesien*, F. C. Achard, discovered that a certain beet could be turned into sugar and would therefore abolish slavery in the sugar cane industry with all its cruelty, and thus it would spread peace on earth.

An ode to this humble vegetable was then created and began with this poetic first line:

O wunderville Runkelrübe.

Die Torte

Eine Torte ist rund just like a pie, but it is usually bigger around. This example of baked goods is so popular in Germany, that it comes in uncountable varieties and has no real translation in English.

On the second or third day after my arrival in Germany I am always drawn into a *Café* or a *Konditorei* for a piece of *Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte*, the Black Forest Cherry Torte, which is a divine creation including cherries (*Kirschen*), chocolate cake, whipped cream and more whipped cream, grated chocolate, and a shot of *Kirsch* which is a liquor made of guess what. The *Likör* is poured over the *Torte* to keep it moist. Children and American teetotalers have to blow over their piece twice to get rid of the alcohol.

Birthday cakes are *Geburtstagsorten* with a smooth coating like *Marzipan* oder *Buttercreme* which can be beautifully decorated.

Very colorful (*bunt*) are the easy-to-make *Obsttorten*. You bake or buy a plain *Tortenboden*, which is the bottom of a Torte-to-be, and cover it with fruit like a slice of *Ananas* (pineapple) in the center, and other fruit around it. This is your opportunity to use up that can of sour cherries that has graced your pantry for two years (*oder noch länger?*). Then you smother everything with *Tortenguss*, a jello like sweet, transparent substance. *Schlagsahne* (whipped cream) adds to the enjoyment of the day.

When in *Amerika*, I replace *Torten* with pies for which I have no German word. Pecan pie, pumpkin pie and apple pie a-la-mode represent American cuisine quite well.

Being an American with German upbringing, which would I choose to eat when somebody offered me a piece of Key lime pie and *ein Stück Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte*? Of course, I would eat *beide*, both of them.

Simplification!

It's so simple! Most English words that end in "-tion" are also used in German with the same or similar meaning. opposition = *Opposition*; station = *Station*; complication = *Komplikation*. . . They are always feminine (die) and, as nouns, they are always capitalized; *die Nation*, *die Situation*. . . They are always pronounced with the stress on the "on" and rhyme somewhat with "see-own". Now, take your *Bleistift* and write down ten new German words you never knew you knew.

1) *die Po.* . . 2) *die Dis.* . .

Feiern

Feiern is the plural of (*die*) *Feier*; the verb *feiern* means to celebrate, to party, to turn into a fest, to observe, to enjoy. The urge to *feiern* is embedded in the German soul. “*Man muss die Feste feiern, wie sie fallen.*” That seems to be the guiding principle of German social life. One has to celebrate whenever there is an opportunity.

There are official *Feiertage*, comparable to our bank holidays, but there are so many more of them: The Mondays after Easter and Pentacost (*Ostermontag und Pfingstmontag*), the day after Christmas (*der zweite Weihnachtsfeiertag*), *Tag der deutschen Einheit* (3. Oktober). Other days off from work and with schools closed vary from region to region, especially where most people are catholic. Then there is the *Fasching* season with *Rosenmontag* as the culmination of a season of wild parties and many a day when no work gets done due to hangovers (*Kater*) and sheer exhaustion (*Ich bin ja so kaputt!*) from dancing, singing, yelling, marching and eating and drinking too much. *Karneval* (*fashing*) is being *gefeiert besonders in Köln und Mainz mit großen Paraden*. Flirting is an accepted ritual during *Karnevalsfeiern*. There is nothing like snuggling up to your son's soccer coach who is tabu for the rest of the year.

Nowadays one finds reason to *feiern* that were not known before. My brother's sister-in-law *feiert den “Moment des Wohlfühlens”*, when she feels well, with a *Glas Pfefferminztee*. *Meine Freundin Gisela schrieb: “Sonntags bleibe ich zuhause und feiere die Einsamkeit.”*

Heute hat es in Austin, Texas, geregnet. Das muss man feiern. Prosit!

O Jay!

Oh, Jay! There was at least one thing to learn from the O.J. Simpson trial: Defense lawyers talked about a "redacted" version of the Fuhrman tapes. Webster's says "to redact" means something like to edit.

Now you know why the German translation of "editor" is "*Redakteur*".

Illustrierte

Illustrierte are magazines illustrated with lots of pictures. An Example is “*Frau im Trend – die aktuelle Info-Illustrierte*”. Others call themselves *Magazine* like „*tina – Das Premium-Frauenmagazin*“. Many *Magazine* share the same topics: *Klatsch und Tratsch* (gossip) about people of reputation. Tennis star Boris Becker is still making headlines with “*Neuer Sex-Skandal!*” *Der Fürst und die Fürstin von Monaco erwarteten 2014 ein Baby*. Soraya, who had a German mother, bled ink for decades on every paper that didn’t resist, but now she is hardly mentioned any more since she died in Paris in 2003.

One could think that death keeps people out of the News. For most of us that is true. But not for Adolf Hitler. It is assumed that he died in 1945, and much has been talked and written about him ever since, mostly in the past tense. Then came the reputable German magazine “Stern” with its 22 April, 1983 edition. *Stern* is not one of those *Klatsch und Tratsch* weeklies. It is known and appreciated for in-depth articles based on reliable sources. So when the “Stern” printed the first part of “*Hitler – Tagebücher*” (Hitler diaries) which – so it was explained – had recently been discovered, most readers were surprised about Hitler having written a secret diary, but “Stern” was a respected *Illustrierte* and was trusted. The talented forger was Konrad Paul Kujau.

Most *Illustrierte* feature several *Kreuzworträtsel* (crossword puzzles), often covering entire pages. The level of knowledge required depends on the expected level of education of the average reader. Everybody knows the name of a big river in *Ägypten* with three letters, but only a few *Deutsche* can tell you the *Geburtsort* (birth place) of George Washington. Nowadays Sudokus are as *populär* in *Deutschland* as in *Amerika*, usually considered somewhat Japanese, but a lady now in her nineties told me she did them as a child in Düsseldorf as *Neuner Puzzle*. Many husbands buy several of the many weekly *Illustrierte* for their wife, because they want to do the *Kreuzworträtsel* before she studies recipes for a *Sauerkrautdiät* oder *Biersuppe*.

Illustrierte in Europa tend to follow the trials and tribulations of royalty and upper nobility. Didn’t the *Fürst von Monaco* marry Grace Kelly, who was not

blue-blooded? Does König *Willem – Alexander von den Niederlanden* suffer from *Drepressionen*? One should not forget that many European countries are monarchies of some sort.

Instead of subscribing to a German *Illustrierte*, I'll soon *abonnieren* a *Zeitschrift*, a magazine that presents cultural, political and general interest subject. "Focus"? "Der Spiegel"? "Stern" after all? As they say in Germany: *Da muss ich erstmal googeln*.

Ruf mich doch mal an!

Ruf rhymes with the English spoof. *Er ruft* means he calls or he is calling. We ask: "Who is calling?" when we want to know who is calling us on the phone (*Wer ruft denn an?*) As with most frequently used words, *rufen* has many meanings and uses.

Common words like *rufen* have countless prefixes, suffixes, word combinations, nuances and meanings. *Ruf mich doch mal an* was once an advertising slogan for a phone company and might now have something suggesting texting. (*Kannst du mir texten?*)

Der Anrufbeantworter is the answering machine which records an *Anruf* and plays a message. I love it when I have to call many people with a short bit of information. Texting messes everything up, at least for me.

There is *der Beruf* (profession,), *der gute Ruf* (good reputation), *das Berufungsgericht* (appeals court), *der Nachruf* (obituary), *der Aufruf* (proclamation) ...the list is too long for this publication.

Past tense of *er ruft* is *er rief*. I bought a plate in an antique shop in Texas which shows a youthful, happy soldier, a drummer, and the words: *DER KOENIG RIEF UND ALLE ALLE KAMEN 1813 – 1913*. I wonder, what the Koenig - in 1913 it was the Kaiser - *rief*, to make even my *Opa* (father of 5) march off to war in 1914.

Berufen, die Berufung, reminds me of Otto Hofmann, a Texas native with excellent command of German, who was known world-wide for his skill and knowledge concerning pipe organs. He was in his eighties when he was interviewed and filmed for a documentary. He called me while the film crew was packing up: "Helga, *ich habe endlich entdeckt, zu was ich berufen bin: Ich bin dazu berufen, ein Schauspieler zu sein.*" He had just discovered that his calling was to be an actor. He passed away a year or two later, keeping his claim to fame and his *guten Ruf als Organist und Orgel Spezialist*.

Damals

Damals, in those days.....everything was better. Well, not really; it was different, *es war anders*. Let's go back to the years after WWII.

Damals, *Kaffee und Butter* could be contraband, *amerikanische Zigaretten* could buy you a warm winter coat or land you in jail. Black market access to a doctor in the British Occupational Forces could supply you with *Penizillin*, which saved my little brother's life after his *Blinddarm*, his appendix, had burst.

Damals, im Jahre 1492, als Kolumbus um die Welt segeln wollte, he didn't know about *Amerika*. He thought, *er sei in Indien gelandet*. *Die damaligen Eingeborenen* (natives of those days) *von Amerika nennt man deshalb Indianer*. But *heutzutage* (nowadays) they are also *Amerikaner*, wenn sie in den USA leben. *Die Eingeborenen von Indien sind Inder*.

Damals, after WWI, there was not enough food available in *Deutschland*. However, there was a good supply of *Steckrüben*, a kind of a big turnip which grows well in the heavy clay soil of *Norddeutschland*. My mother told me, that she had to eat *Steckrüben* for two meals a day. Those were the *Steckrübenjahre*. Can one buy *Steckrüben* in einem *amerikanischen Supermarkt*?

Damals, als ich ein Kind war, we had few toys, *keinen Fernseher*, *keinen Rechner* (computer), *kein Handy* (cell phone). *Wir hatten aber viel Zeit und viel Fantasie*, and therefore we played a lot of tricks (*Streiche*) on people. Z. B: Sitting on a bench in front of our house, my brother and I would point at a passing lady's skirt and giggle: "*Tante, dein Unterrock guckt hinten raus*." (Auntie, your slip is showing in the back.) The lady would then walk with a wobble. We *Kinder* thought we were so wicked and naughty! Our mother, however, watching us from the upstairs kitchen window, enjoyed the spectacle.

Damals, when there were not enough clergymen in Texas to fulfill the need for marrying, baptizing and burials, the "Whiskey Priests" arrived on the scene and sprinkled a touch of Christianity on going-ons.

Gehört

<i>Das gehört sich nicht.</i>	That is not proper behavior.
<i>Das gehört mir nicht.</i>	That does not belong to me.
<i>Das habe ich nicht gehört.</i>	I have not heard that.
<i>Das gehört in den Keller.</i>	That belongs in the basement.

As is obvious, the word *gehört* has many meanings.

People ask me "What does *geho*, *geho* with two dots *r t* mean in English?" When I answer "You mean *gehört*? I need to hear it in context." Many callers conclude then that I am too nitpicky for their needs

There are many participles as well as infinitives starting with *ge*, and I love to let my mind play with finding them.....braten, briet, gebraten; raten, riet, geraten - o lala! geraten? Er hat mir geraten, den Braten langsam zu braten. So ist der Braten gut geraten. geraten = *advised*; *geraten* = *to turn out good*.

Weißt du, wie alt ich bin? Dreimal darfst du raten. Wenn du es richtig geraten hast, rate ich dir, es nicht zu verraten.

Wenn jemand intensiv hört, sagt man in English "he listens". Im Deutschen kann man sagen er horcht. If the little boy does not listen to what he is told, sagt man er gehorcht nicht.

The word *horchen* brings to mind a popular folksong with a compelling marching rhythm:

*Horch was kommt von draußen rein.
Hollahi, hollaho
Muss wohl mein fein's Liebchen sein.
Hollahihaho*

Was ist Pfingsten?

The seventh Sunday after *Ostern* (Easter) is *Pfingsten* (Pentecost), when *der Heilige Geist* (the Holy Ghost) descended upon the Apostles, or so the story goes. It is a popular weekend for *Hochzeiten* (weddings) and *Wanderungen* (hikes) through *Wald und Feld* (woods and fields). Some people decorate their *Haus* (house) and *Ochsen* (oxen), and some might even attend a church service. Please remember: *Pfingstmontag* is a *Feiertag* (bank holiday) in Deutschland.

Der Ersatz

A basic translation of *Ersatz* is 'replacement'; not the act of replacing something, but rather the thing that serves or can serve as a replacement or substitute. Most *Autos* have four tires (*Reifen*) and a spare tire. That spare is called *Ersatzreifen*.

A man with a spare tire around his waist does not have an *Ersatzreifen*; he has a *Bierbauch*, a beer belly. My uncle Hermann sported a respectable *Bierbauch* which preceded him all the way to the Russian front in late 1944. His personal *Schneider* (tailor) had to create a *Uniform* that fit him. *Onkel* Hermann was not really fit to fight, but he was considered useful for digging trenches, so he was drafted (*eingezogen*) and sent to *graben*. It was a dangerous assignment, so close to the front. An *Ersatz* for a fallen soldier could be found easily as long as there were living male bodies around, 15 years old or older, even much older.

Onkel Hermann was by trade a wholesaler of *Schokolade, Bonbons und Pralinen*. However, these delicacies had become very hard to get, so he had to deal in whatever he could buy as *Ersatz* to keep his business going. Somehow he had found a supplier of *Dujardin*, a liquor, which kept him and several neighbors in good spirits.

Sugar was rationed and at times not available, so we had to find an *Ersatz* for it. For home use as sweets, we dried apples, plums or neighbors pears that were hanging over the fence.

Two other things were in high demand: *Zigaretten und Kaffee*. There was no *Ersatz* for *Zigaretten*, so my father, a law abiding Prussian civil servant, had created a spot in the vegetable garden where his illegal *Tabak* thrived in secrecy, and was then dried in the attic behind a stack of old mattresses.

Luckily, *meine Mutter und meine Oma* did not smoke, but a cup of *Kaffee* was the highlight of the day when they got one. It had to be *richtiger Bohnenkaffee* made of real coffee beans, not *Ersatzkaffee* (also called *Muckefuck*) made of roasted barley or other grain. We children drank cold *Muckefuck* in the summer, because it

is a good thirst quencher (*Er löscht den Durst so gut*).

The important little word with *Ersatz* is *oder* (or).

Man nimmt Vanille oder Vanilleersatz. Man backt mit Butter oder mit Butterersatz wie Margarine.

Ich habe einen Ersatz gefunden für Fitnesstraining in dem Sprichwort, a wise saying indeed:

Nach dem Essen sollst du ruh'n oder tausend Schritte tun.

That means, after a meal you can rest as *Ersatz* for walking those miserable thousand steps.

Tripping in Germany

If you want to find out about a country, go there and get sick or injured. Last April, I flew to my hometown in Deutschland, Herford, stumbled (*stolperte*) on the sidewalk and fell flat on my face, had injuries (*Verletzungen*) and got sick (*wurde krank*) and *landete im Hospital* a few days later. Fortunately (*Gott-sei-Dank*), I had *eine gute Reiseversicherung* (travel insurance) and no broken bones. My face was blue, red and purple and featured a pattern of sparkling skin abrasions. *Eine Ambulanz brachte mich ins Hospital.*

I shared a room with a lady from a little village nearby. I never knew how resourceful I can be when circumstances require. That lady couldn't sleep at night and was given two sleeping pills (*Schlaftabletten*). But she didn't take them and asked me to throw them *ins Klo* (into the toilet). *Natürlich habe ich die Pillen selbst geschluckt*, took them myself and flushed the commode to pretend I had disposed of the pills. I know one should not flush pills down the drain, and I had only acted "as if", *als ob*. *Dann waren wir beide glücklich. Meine Zimmernachbarin grunzte die ganze Nacht, aber ich konnte etwas schlafen.*

Supper, *Abendbrot im deutschen Hospital*: It consisted of a slice of rye bread (*Roggenbrot oder Graubrot*), a cubic cm of Butter, *eine Scheibe Fleischwurst* (bologna) und *etwas Velveta*. Many Germans eat only *eine Scheibe Brot zum Abendbrot*.

I am too Americanized and wanted real food and felt deprived while in the *Krankenhaus*.

The funniest and most embarrassing aspect of the experience was my *Nachthemd*, my nightgown. Since I was literally picked up from the street, I had to do with one of those gowns the *Hospital* generously hands out to poor people that come in as patients. These things open to the back, and you have to use at least one, but better two hands to keep your *derriere* private.

I have traveled a lot in my almost 80 years, and I managed to cope with many an odd situation. One of them occurred deep in the desert of Saudi Arabia.

We were on a bus to go shopping in an oasis. The driver stopped half way there and announced "peee peee", We all found a place behind the dunes and also discovered a group of nomads, men, women and children. They were packing up, and then all of their women went to one side and squatted down to relieve themselves. All of them bared their bottom in full sight of the men. Our American men didn't know where to look.

If you want to get sick or injured in a foreign country, don't chose Saudi Arabia, because many Saudis consider your misfortune Allah's punishment for something you did or didn't. Been there, done that. But they have wonderful bread in abundance, which I remembered fondly when I chewed that one single slice in the hospital at supper time in Germany.