

## A CASE FOR HAY-ROLL TURKEYS ... DON RICARDO'S REPORT FROM THE HIGH RHINE, NOV. 2015

I better get a move on if I want to put a letter out this month. Thanksgiving has come and gone. A year ago this time Edith and I spent the day driving around the Texas Hill Country. We ate dinner in Fredericksburg, at the only restaurant we could find open. Not known or celebrated here, Thanksgiving remains a uniquely American custom. You won't see hay-roll turkeys decorating a farmer's pasture, and you're not likely to find a whole one in the grocery store here either. The ovens are too small for one thing, but I think the main reason is turkeys don't figure into the Swiss foundation story. Turkey and William Tell? Halloween has caught on, though, and even Black Friday sales. When did that start? I think the Swiss should adopt Thanksgiving. I think we should all get behind hay-roll turkeys.

Down on the Rhine the water runs low and clear. We had day after day of beautiful, dry weather this month, but it almost felt like it went on too long. We both got a touch of flu. Finally rains came, along with colder weather. We've had our first snow, a light dusting. Christmas lights are up on the main street, and in the windows and doors of the houses. Dark closes in by five o'clock. This time back in the summer we would just be coming back from swimming, or sitting in a chair with a wine spritzer watching the boats and bathers float by. It's empty down there now, nobody around but dog-walkers and the occasional fisherman.

For our Thanksgiving dinner Edith made fennel au gratin. Quartered and blanched, wrapped in thin ham slices, topped with a sauce and grated cheese. We listened to *Concierto de Aranjuez*, one of my favorite pieces, from our flea-market LP collection. Later she read while I practiced a couple of new songs.

When Edith turns on the news, I always make a point to try and follow awhile. But this is often where I retreat into English and read the *New York Times*. Or watch the Facebook scroll. My thoughts come in random-selection. The refugee crisis? Millions of people on the move? There have been mass human migrations throughout history. Recent advances in DNA analysis have given us a map; the history of the human race is written there, waiting to be deciphered. Nobody dreamed of this in 1900 Galveston, the scene of my novel-in-progress. People lived in a full rush of technological and social upheaval, just as we are today. It amazes me to reflect that the house we live in—where we've been a mere fifteen years—was already centuries old then. I have only a tenuous grasp of all this, but sometimes the pieces fit together. If not a Eureka moment, it comes more like a quiet affirmation. A kind of thanks, I guess.

I haven't played any gigs this month, our last one being the 31<sup>st</sup> of October. Amazon sales brought in \$17.50. That won't buy much affirmation, or anything else these days. But it was never about the money. Chances were always slim, I knew that from the beginning. My joy, my religion if you will, is working in words and music. All these thousands of hours have brought me untold pleasure. An artist's life is a way of giving back for pleasure received, and a thank you as well.

It's not always going to be fun. No matter how much you love it, work is work. It gets tedious and your eyes glaze over. Along with other pieces of writerly wisdom, a note pinned to my wall reads: "Don't whine—Nobody is making you do this." Good to remember, thanks for the advice.

The whole picture hangs together for a moment. Then it falls apart and I begin picking up the shards and placing them back together again into a new arrangement.

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In recent news, *Plenty Good People*, the duo recording with W.C. Jameson, will be released on Brambus Records, Switzerland early next year. Recorded in Texas by Texans, It's cool to think a lot more people are going to hear it on a real label. Even though, as we've all been told, the CD is dead. As I mentioned last month, we have another recording in the works here in Switzerland. I'm logging steady progress with another re-write and edit of the book.

And now for my soapbox moment: You know the drill by now: Support independent music and art, and the people who make it. Buy a book or a record. Go see a show. Support hay-roll turkeys. Best to you all, hope to see you down the road.

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