

DON RICARDO'S NEWS FROM THE HIGH RHINE... 31 JANUARY 2013

27 January. There was something different about the light this morning that captured my notice. Still gray, the ceiling had broken, and I could see layers in the cloud and luminescence behind them, with a big swath of pale golden sky behind the Rodenberg, the hill east of town.

Edith made pancakes, my favorite breakfast, and I took it as a sure sign she is feeling better and over her flu. Later after breakfast I walked down to the kiosk for a paper and continued east of town. Snow still lay on the fields, on the roads that were never salted, and down on the Rhine. The south bank is always in shadow there, and footing was treacherous on the icy path. My reward was having the whole river to myself. Crows called back and forth from trees over on the German side. The mallards chased one another, taking off and flying upstream to drift back. I could see swans feeding on the far side.

I came back up the hill at a point above the *Badi*—the swimming area—where the path was clear and offered firm footing. Once up on top I looked down over the valley and across to the vineyards on the far side. Lengthening my stride on the dry pavement, I took off my gloves and partly unzipped my jacket. I had a growing premonition spring might not be far off.

We walked together the same way the next morning, except we walked back to town by the main road instead of going down to the river. We had easier going, the snow mushier and affording better traction. Back at the flat we heated up a leftover dinner of *Federkohl*—savoy cabbage—from the garden, and potatoes. Later she went to Schaffhausen by train and I leaned out the window to wave to her as she walked to the *Bahnhof*. A trickle of water was feeding from a pipe into the gutter, and I could see that the snow cover had partly receded from the rooftops.

Rain came on the 29th and the thaw began in earnest. The next day the snow was gone, with the temperature reading 12° Celsius on the balcony thermometer. Figuring this was the morning I had been waiting for, I pumped up my tires and went out for a bike ride. My first ride since I left back in October, I felt a little stiff and got no further than Basadingen, a couple of kilometers from here. It was good to be out on the bike again on a route where I feel like my regular traversing has conferred upon me some kind of entitlement.

The fields were wet and muddy, and the *Geisbach* running swiftly from the rains. I could see where the beaver had been busy, having chewed their way through any number of trees along the road by Willisdorf. I guess left to their own devices they would begin constructing dams and ponds. But with the way the creek bed is ditched and straightened with steep banks on each side, I don't see that happening here. Still, it's a comfort to see a signs of wildlife, of nature's resiliency.

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Scarcely home three weeks now, I'm already busy with plans for a return to the States in the spring. Trying to assemble all the odds and ends and getting back to work, to cultivate strength and balance, and above all to keep seeking the light, I have plenty of work to keep me busy. After a hiatus of nearly five years, current work involves two new CDs in production. I am two songs short of finishing a record I've been working on with Thomm Jutz in his studio outside Nashville, scheduled for release on Brambus Records later this year. Meanwhile, another record is edging towards completion in Texas, a collection of story songs about the Gulf Coast. I'm excited about these new projects and the chance to put this new music out.

Readers may notice a change in the heading of this letter. With the collected *Don Ricardo's Life and Times* now with an editor, I've decided to retire the title. Originally called *Poor Richard's Newsletter*, this series goes back over thirty years to Galveston Island. I thought it was a good time to let it go, with all the zillions of blogs out there. It contains a lot of history, mostly written on the fly; it's about music, companions, jobs on boats and drilling rigs, and near constant traveling. Titled *The Years the Wind Blew Away*, I don't know yet if this will be a print book or a digital release.

Why a person would want to put out records when so few people buy them these days is a question that begs an answer. While I have far less experience in the book world, the parallels seem obvious, the problems much the same. But when I think about it, my whole life has been one quixotic leap of faith. Why worry now? I recall a piece of graffiti that said "if you're not composing, you're decomposing." Old habits die hard, and I probably going to keep on writing songs and books as long as I can, regardless.

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