

## DON RICARDO'S REPORT FROM THE HIGH RHINE... MARCH 2015

I apologize to all and sundry for not putting out a newsletter last month. I caught a cold towards the end, and got busy with rehearsals for a show on the 27<sup>th</sup>. That didn't leave me with any more month, February being a short one. Just by way of explaining; in all the years of its existence this newsletter has never gone out on a regular schedule.

Our neighbor Kurt Rauch built a 1/250 scale model replica of our town of Diessenhofen as it appears in a print dating from 1627. On display in a window on the main street, it is a painstakingly detailed piece of work, with all the houses, city walls, watchtowers, and gates in place, and even a moat around the back of the town.

Tilted, as if seen from a balloon, the view is from the north with the Rhine in the foreground. The bridge crossing the river at that time had a tower, and a section of the bridge that could be drawn up. For protection, I assumed, or to let taller boats pass underneath. Perched atop the city wall at the SW corner, our house is plainly visible.

In *Pleasures of the High Rhine*, I tell about how we found this place, and the stone lintel above the doorway with the inscription *Zum Ochsen*, place of the oxen, with the date, 1832. The book goes on to mention this time in reference to the life of Mark Twain. I guessed that there must have been a house here before that had burned or been torn down. Now, looking at the scale replica, I could plainly see that the house we live in today was standing here a full two-centuries before, and the 19<sup>th</sup> century inscription above the door must have come with a later remodeling. It is the same house, the same alignment of the roofs, with the open space below facing the street. Open to the sky, the enclosed space behind can also be seen, larger before the balconies and dormers went in, a 20<sup>th</sup> century modification that opened up the interior space here under the roof. In the old days our place would have been the attic, and the ground floor almost certainly a place with stalls for animals.

Old in Mark Twain's time, this house may have been here in the time of J.S. Bach, predating the Industrial Revolution, perhaps even the Reformation, which began in this part of Europe in 1519 when a reformer named Ulrich Zwingli began preaching in Zürich. I often get a shiver, touching these old beams, imagining where and under what circumstances the wood was cut and hauled here. What kind of tools people used, what the countryside looked like then. Sometimes I can almost capture it, but my imagining spirals beyond, like a time-machine in reverse; back to the Romans who took it from the Celts, controlling this area for a few-hundred years before surrendering it in turn to Germanic invaders from the north. A small city-state for much of its existence, the town of Diessenhofen itself dates from around 1000.

The new book inches forward. I can only go as fast as the project will let me. For days on end I feel like I'm living in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. We're in Galveston now, spring of 1900. I feel like Tom and Sarah, my principal characters, are real people. I dream about them. He is a young railroad engineer, proud of his skills. She is pregnant. They are deeply in love and looking to the future, with a new century beginning. They have no idea that the worst natural disaster in United States history will hit the Island. My title, as I may have mentioned before, comes from the second song on our *Gulf Coast Tales* CD, "All of This Was Mine," which in turn was inspired by a story in the *Galveston Daily News*.

Speaking of news: As mentioned in the January newsletter, I'm excited about starting a new record with W.C. Jameson in Texas next month. Story teller, educator, treasure hunter, author,

songwriter with a voice like Waylon, W.C. also used to kick-box, and is the kind of guy you'd want on your side, should things ever come to that.

In other news, I've been invited to do an interview for an upcoming documentary film on Guy Clark to be released in conjunction with the publication of a biography of Guy written by Tamara Saviano. It's been nearly forty years, and I've long ago lost the copy, but it was Guy who sang the original demo of "Baby Ride Easy," when I first moved to Nashville in June of 1971. It all fits, and I am very happy to have a small part in this story.

Here in Europe: A Bear Family Records release of a long out-of-print CD called *Mankind*, recorded live with Susie Monick and Mark "Sergio" Webb is in the works. I'll have more on this as information becomes available.

I haven't played many festivals lately—and I've never been to Scandinavia—so, it's a double pleasure to announce I'll be part of a Townes Van Zandt tribute at the Tonder Festival in Denmark next August.

Woo—and tomorrow night I'm doing a show with old friend David Waddell and his Hellbound Train Band at the Alabama Steak House in nearby Unterstamheim, right here in Canton Thurgau. David and his brother Leland played on *Save the World*, an LP we made at Jack Clement's in Nashville in the early 1980s, produced by Jim Rooney, with Danny Rowland on acoustic, and the legendary Irish guitarist Philip Donnelly on electric. I just talked with Philip the other night, first time in many years. His latest record came in the mail yesterday. I've got one ready to go to him. Small world indeed.

Best wishes to all. Support independent art and artists.

Richard J. Dobson  
Diessenhofen am Rhein, 13 March 2015

[www.richard-j-dobson.ch](http://www.richard-j-dobson.ch)

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