

## WINTER IS ICCUMIN IN... DON RICARDO'S REPORT FROM THE HIGH RHINE... JANUARY 2016

A Syrian man and his family have taken over a vacant garden space behind ours. He's a Kurd, and a Christian, with five or six kids. They are shy, have learned a few words of *Deutsch*. Someone has been looking after them. He has a job with the city on the maintenance crew, and I see him around town in his orange pants and reflector jacket. He recognizes me now, and we wave. Back in the summer he nailed up a little plastic-lined shelter in his garden patch, with a table and a couple of folding chairs. Our in-between garden neighbor, Jon, a retired border policeman, told Edith the Syrian was keeping a stash of whiskey back there, that he had seen him asleep drunk. I wouldn't know about that. Maybe I'd do the same in his shoes. There's no telling what kind of sorrow those people left behind.

There used to be a Muslim family that had the same garden plot the Kurd family has now. They always came and went in a group, women and kids chatting among themselves. They never spoke or said hello to anybody else.

I know it's not good manners to swear, and I was brought up better; taught it was a sin, taking the Lord's name in vain. But in my years working on drilling rigs and boats, Goddamn was such a part of the vernacular, it didn't even raise an eyebrow. Normally I wouldn't have said it. I had just come up on my bike, pumped up and excited, and stopped to talk with my friend Hans-Ruedi Brandenberger. We were over by the cemetery wall that abuts the gardens, just as some women in headscarves had walked by. Without realizing, I said Goddamn loud enough for them to hear, and one turned and gave me a dirty look. It didn't register until later, but those women *never* look at anyone. My swearing—in English—had obviously touched her in a sensitive place.

So much for my small contribution to intercultural misunderstanding. It wouldn't register a blip on the scale of misunderstanding that went down at the Cologne train station New Year's Eve, where an astonishing number of women have come forward and complained of sexual harassment and robbery by gangs of drunken young men who surrounded and attacked them. These men acted on a misunderstanding of the public place in Europe, the mistaken belief that women outside of the home are prostitutes, and can be touched in their sensitive places with impunity. They felt entitled to steal their cell phones too. They spoke French, and Arabic. Similar incidents were reported in Hamburg and Stuttgart. This couldn't have happened at a worse time for Angela Merkel, who has admitted a million refugees into Germany, mostly from the war in Syria. Apparently the press played down this story at first. Now about eight-hundred women have come forward with complaints to the police. The chief was forced to resign.

This news follows on the heels of the Paris attacks. The talk show experts have fresh ammunition; esteemed journalists write op-eds in the International New York Times. I'm a stranger here myself, and write out of long habit. I didn't come fleeing a war. I go down by the Rhine and imagine I see Roman ships out in midstream. It's peaceful down there. Walking along the path, I see the old concrete gun emplacements, overgrown and practically invisible, at every bend of the river. I don't feel like I live in this century, really. I try to take in a longer view. I hear Ancient Music in my head, old Ezra Pound: *Winter is iccumin, Lude sing Goddamn...*

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Putting up a website and advertising your wares there, hoping to snag a little attention, is like hacking a runway out of a jungle mountaintop in the hope that a plane will land and disgorge its riches. If you could look at your life in a documentary, you might see yourself, hunkered by a campfire waiting for your plane to come in. Ah, but things are looking good, with each day giving a few more moments of light. I saw a guy cleaning fish where I caught my big grayling years ago. Somebody's catching fish. The river is up a little, with snow in the mountains. I noticed a slight uptick in Amazon sales. We're making plans for spring.

*Plenty Good People*, the new duo recording with W.C. Jameson, will be out on Brambus Records next month. We have gigs coming up in Texas in March, which reminds me I need to update my website. Work goes ahead with the novel. I hope to finish it this year.

Best to all, hope to see you down the road.

Richard J. Dobson, Diessenhofen am Rhein

21 January 2016

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