

# Observer-land FEATURES

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## Just Chattin'

You Can't Beat the Dutch For Christmas Customs  
by W. W. EDGAR

WELL, it's Christmastime again, and the joyous occasion never comes around without a few pang of nostalgia with a wish that in the Pennsylvania Dutch Country—even for a brief moment—life were as it was in the past.

Along life's journey one is exposed to many fascinating customs of the people in various sections of the Pennsylvania Dutch Country. One of the most fascinating is the custom of the Pennsylvania Dutch at Christmastime.

These friendly folks, noted far and wide for their cleanliness and their cooking ability, work all year for the pleasure of displaying their "Putz" at Christmastime. For the uninitiated a "putz" is a platform on which the Christmas tree is placed before it is decorated and it serves as part of the Christmas display.

The "putz" runs the gamut from snow scenes to miniature cities, with such things as electric railroad systems complete with trains and stations. They even have tunnels through which the train must pass to complete its trip.

STILL others are confined to an elaborate display of the Nativity, even to having the Wise Men slowly walking over the hills following the star of Bethlehem. These things are fascinating, but to the stranger, or visitor, it is the manner in which they are shown. These kindly "Dutch" people, taking pride in their work, invite folks into their home to see the display and the invitation is a simple sign on the porch, "Putz Open."

I had occasion, several years ago, to visit in the "old home town" and while there at Christmastime saw one of the most beautiful "putz" I ever had seen. This family had gone out to the woods to select a tree. Instead of the conventional evergreen, they chose the top of a sassafras tree.

This has a sort of sticky bark. To this was wrapped the electric wires of lights and then the entire tree was sprinkled with imitation snow. Under the large, dark, gnarled branches of the tree, the lights were covered with a white sheet and spread mirrors about, then covered the entire section with the imitation snow.

What a winter scene!

The only thing to come close to equaling it was the sight of the Moravian choir, high in the church tower, on Christmas Eve, singing the favorite Christmas carols. If anything were needed to put you in the spirit of things that would.

THE approach of the Pennsylvania Dutch to gifts at the Yuletide is fascinating, too.

For instance, they wouldn't think of filling a stocking for the youngsters until after they had carefully placed a nice, big orange in the toe. If they wanted to punish the youngsters for something they had done, they'd put pieces of hard coal on top of the orange.

And the adults exchange only the type of gifts that would be useful. They don't go much for frivolities.

Which reminds me of the most shocking Yuletide experience I ever have had.

One afternoon I asked a married acquaintance what he was buying his wife for Christmas and he answered, "Nothing—she didn't use what I gave her last year."

"What did you give her?" I asked, and he answered rather snarlingly, "A grave in the cemetery."

That's the Pennsylvania Dutch approach.

Merry Christmas!

impressions  
by sue shaughnessy

The character of the American GI never seems to change. Stories are legendary about the grumbling of the GI combined with a sense of humor from World War I and II and Korea.

In Vietnam, the same situation exists.

Mrs. Florence Altemus of Farmington received a "social warning" from her son Bill's buddies announcing that the young man would soon return to the "land of the big PX."

The letter reads in part:

"Very soon Bill Altemus will once again be in your midst, de-Americanized, demoralized and dehydrated, but only once more to take his place as a human being, to engage in life, liberty and somewhat delayed pursuit of happiness."

"In making your joyous preparations to welcome him back into respectable society, you must make allowances for the crude environment in which he has suffered for the past 11 months."

Therefore, show no alarm if he prefers to squat rather than sit on a chair. He may pad around in sandals and towel, slyly offer to sell cigarettes to the postman, and pick at his food suspiciously as though you were trying to poison him. . . . Please be tolerant when he tries to buy everything at half the asking price, accuses the grocer of being a thief, and refuses to enter any establishment that doesn't have steel-mesh screens over the doors and windows. . . .

"Make no flattering remarks about exotic Southeast Asia, avoid mention of the benefits of overseas duty, the fun-sound of monsoon rain on the roof, and above all, ask for permission before mentioning food delicacies of the East such as fried rice (fried rice). The mere reference to any of the subjects may trigger off an awesome display of violence. . . ."

"Keep in mind that beneath this tanned and rugged exterior there beats a heart of pure gold. Treasure this for it is about the only thing of value he has left. Treat him with kindness, tolerance and an occasional fifth of good whiskey, and you will soon be able to rehabilitate this hollow shell of the man you once knew."

That's the substance of the warning. Some of it hits pretty close to home if you're stationed in Vietnam. The references are a mixture of the hazards of Army life in general and the trials of being stationed in Vietnam in particular.

The grumbling is still mixed with humor though.

# LETTERS TO SANTA

Dear Santa:  
I love you. My name is Cuthbert Hall, I'm four years old. I don't suck my thumb anymore but sometimes I do at night.

Please make a Baby Boo for me. And I would like a new watch, a new dress with a pink bow and red stripes. Baby Magic for me please.

Please bring a new bone for my dog whose name is Domino but I call her Lassie.

When you come we will leave some brownies in the kitchen for you.

I also want some new record and some viewmaster slides.

Thank you very much.  
Love  
Cathy Hall, Livonia

Dear Santa:  
My name is James Kentala, I am 8 years old in third grade. We moved to Detroit now from Fulton. First of all I would like a new bag for all the things you brought me last year. This year you can bring anything you want.

Also bring something for my big brother. Don't forget all the little children in the world. I will have lunch for you and sugar lumps for your reindeer. Merry Christmas to you and Mrs. Claus and all of your helpers.

Your friend  
James Kentala

Dear Santa:  
My name is Marie Necker, I am 8 years old. I would like a Mrs. and Mrs. Mouse House, Doll, Wishnik, some games and some clothes. Thank you.

Tina Marie  
Garden City

Dear Santa:  
I am a big boy of three going on four in five more months. I am good most of the time. I would like a Johnny Eagle gun, and a John John truck and pants and shirt for Sunday School.

A Good boy  
Dale M. Gourley  
Fenton, Redford Township

Dear Santa Claus:  
I would like a game, a Hello Doll, a sled and some new clothes.

I have been a pretty good girl. I am in Kindergarten at Edgewood School.

Your Friend  
Vicki Teddy, Livonia

Dear Santa:  
My name is Sheila, I am two years old. I would like a doll that cries, a book, purple, toys and candy.

I love you Santa.  
Sheila Hargrove  
11490 Post Lane  
South Lyon

Dear Santa:  
I'm sometimes good. My little brother is sometimes bad too. I hope you will come to my house. I will clean up my room. I would like a train and a walkie talkie. My brother would like a bulldozer.

Jamie McGowan  
Farmington

Dear Saint Nicholas:  
What I want for Christmas is Baby first step, 2. Baby Magic, 3. Gumbo with a sugar playall, 4. Cuddly, 5. Sissy Smart, 6. I little no name, 7. penny brit set, 8. mouse house, 9. Katie Kach-nod, 10. Magic Garden Home, 11. bee wee, 12. On (look on back) Easy Bake Oven.

Love, Vickie Vowles

Dear Santa:  
I hope you have a nice Christmas Eve at my house. I'm going to leave you hot cocoa and cookies when you come here. We live in the house with two blue eyes. I am six and a half years old. I help do housework.

Bob Whistler, school work toys.

Love, Cheryl Klomp  
Appleton, Redford Township

Dear Santa:  
My brother Dave and I have been good boys. I would like either creepy crawlers, power shop, I would like a Johnny Magic Christmas Santa.

Love Dave and Jim  
O'Brien  
Garden City, Michigan

Dear Santa:  
We have been good boys. Please bring us some toys.

1. A lane racing set for Bobby 715; 2. wagon; 3. ka-boom balloon game; 4. pistols; 5. re driver; 6. trailer carter; 7. horse and truck; 8. big alarm fire truck; 9. 3007 car; 10. gummy car; 11. cap train action; 12. hot potato game; 13. Mighty Mike; 14. Thunder Bolt.

For Scott - 315 years old. 1. Walker Talkie; 2. truck; 3. fire engine; 4. cars; 5. gun; 6. stuffed animal; 7. Paint set; 8. piano; 9. Gummy; 10. wagon.

Bobby & Scott Silver  
Livonia

Dear Santa:  
We have been very good children. Lisa is 11 months old. Kim is 3 years old. Dana is four years old and Danne is five years old.

Lisa would like a baby toy. Kim wants Cheerful-tearful or whatever doll you have in your bag. Dana wants Baby First Step and Danne wants a Balmbe or a Snow Cone Machine.

We will leave some cookies by the fire place for you.

Merry Christmas,  
Danne, Dana, Kim Lisa  
Shuerdeman  
Dearwood Ct, Livonia

Dear Santa Claus:  
My name is Dawn M. Fisher. Wendy & Jim Fisher.

P.S. We will leave you something to eat. Mommy is writing this for me.

Dear Santa Claus:  
My name is Cheryl Linaki and I am 3 1/2 years old. Would you please bring me a talking puppet, a walking doll, a Batman car, a telephone, I will be a good girl and will leave you cookies and milk on Christmas Eve.

Cheryl Linaki  
Ravine Drive, Livonia

P.S. I'm sending you a picture of myself so that you know you are at the right house on Christmas Eve.

Jeffery  
Garden City

Dear Santa:  
I am five years old and go to school every day. I try to be a good girl. I would like a baby doll and some clothes, a dog, a bugle and some other things. I have a sister and two brothers but they can write their own letter okay. Mom is writing this for me. I'll see you soon.

Love, Doreen Gourley

Dear Santa Claus:  
My name is Cheryl Bowman and I am four years old. My mother is helping me write you this letter.

I would like you to bring me a walking doll, a record player and a big bingo game.

Thank you, Cheryl Bowman  
Gilmah, Livonia

Dear Santa:  
My name is Stephanie, I want to know if you get me a tricycle, Baby Boo, and anything else.

Stephane  
Garden City

Dear Santa:  
My name is Jeffery, I want a bike, Crackfire rifle, silly Saffi, and Sock-em Sock-em Sock.

Jeffery  
Garden City

Dear Santa:  
I want a regular bike for Christmas. A gold bike with handle brakes and three speeds. A Schirin bike.

Creed Jones  
Leona, Garden City

Dear Santa:  
I would like a guitar, a saxophone, laser beam gun, and batmobile. I have been a good boy.

Love Mark Davis  
Garden City

Dear Santa:  
My name is Suzanne. My sister is writing my letter. Most of the time I have been a good girl. Please send me an Easybake oven, Baby First Step, stuffed animal, Tammy Doll, Tammy clothes, little Miss No Name, clothes for me.

Thank you, Santa.  
Your friend,  
Suzanne Stone  
P.S. I love you Santa

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